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Preposterous America: The Language of Inversion in Thoreau, Melville, and Hawthorne

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Doctor of Philosophy
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PREPOSTEROUS AMERICA: THE LANGUAGE OF INVERSION IN THOREAU,
MELVILLE, AND HAWTHORNE

(Monograph)

by

Rasmus R. Simonsen

Graduate Program in English

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
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London, Ontario, Canada

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Abstract

This dissertation stages a series of readings that activate the inherent pull towards a queer aesthetic of “preposterousness” in the American Renaissance. In the introduction, I claim that American Studies and Queer Studies have been *mutually implicated* ever since F.O. Matthiessen’s seminal work *American Renaissance*. In this way, I bring to light the nascent strands of homoeroticsm and “deviant” practices that disrupt the teleology of normative masculinity in the nineteenth century. My intervention develops a queer heuristic through an exploration of the classical figure of hysteron proteron—the rhetorical inversion of the order of things. As a master-trope for my investigation, hysteron proteron allows for a closer investigation of texts on the syntactical level of discourse. Hence, through my textual methodology, I expose a backward-oriented aesthetic that confuses the norm of American progress, in order to build towards potential, or “eventual,” queer spaces. My authors employ hysteron proteron, or the preposterous, in order to champion a different vision of American masculinity.

The texts of Thoreau, Melville, and Hawthorne overlap figurally in ways that allow me to establish a sense of contiguity between them. Thoreau employs hysteron proteron in order to condemn the increasing materiality of nineteenth-century American progress. Thoreau’s turn away from modernity—which is a return to the wilderness—engenders the potential for a sexual mobility that travels along paths that the normative trajectory of nineteenth-century masculinity could not glimpse. Reading Melville through the lens of architectural theory, I am here interested in tracing keywords related to masculine and feminine versions of domesticity as they appear in the short story, “I and

My Chimney.” The aim is to show how the confusion of different spaces and directions works to enhance the profusion of ironic clusters in the narrative. In my final chapter, I show how questions of time, space, gender, and the nonhuman are filtered through a number of “childish confusions” in Hawthorne’s literature. I read the preposterous in Hawthorne as being undercut by a network of surprising connections between orifices and parts, natural and artificial, which recall the figural compounds that informed Thoreau’s nature and Melville’s architecture.

Keywords

American Literature, Nineteenth Century, Thoreau, Melville, Hawthorne, Queer Theory, Gender and Sexuality, Rhetoric, Psychoanalysis.

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Can a regression, even when it is no longer labeled a neurosis, have a place within a utopic imagination?

—Leo Bersani, “Sociability and Cruising”

Introduction: Preposterous America

The scene is one of leisure: Seven figures inhabit Thomas Eakins' tableau entitled *Swimming*, completed in 1885 (plate 1).¹ Five young men of similar, supple build appear in or around the body of water of Dove Lake on Mill Creek, which is located in the vicinity of Philadelphia (Berger 92). All are naked. One man is diving into the water, while another, wet from the thigh down, is encouraging the only nonhuman figure of the painting, a red setter called Harry the dog (Berger 92), to swim towards him; on the left, another man is lounging on the pier, the "downward thrust" of his legs extending the base of the painting (Matthiessen 610). Excepting one, all of the men pictured here were students of Eakins at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Eakins himself appears in the lower right corner, slowly emerging from the water in profile, only his head and left shoulder showing above the water's surface. In this way, "the men of *Swimming* are bound into their communities by their participation in a like exercise, even as they are arrayed at distinct moments of their swim" (Berger 93). Comparing Eakins' style to the poetry of Walt Whitman, F. O. Matthiessen celebrates "the free flexible movement within the composition" that, together with "the rich physical pleasure in the outdoor scene and in the sunlight on the firmly modeled flesh," "would have appealed to Whitman most" (610)—and, we might infer, to Matthiessen himself; indeed, referencing the famous bathing scene from "Song of Myself," Elizabeth Johns dubs Eakins "Whitman's twenty-ninth bather" (78).

¹ The title of the painting was changed not a few times, from *Swimming* to *The Swimmers* in Eakins' own lifetime, and then, in 1917, it became known as *The Swimming Hole*, until it was finally named *The Old Swimming Hole*. Eakins' widow had a hand in the two posthumous changes, which apparently were meant to give the painting a nostalgic feel, as Martin A. Berger notes (89).



Plate 1: Thomas Eakins, *Swimming* (1885).

The central character of the painting is indisputably the male nude standing atop the pier, which has been identified as “the dilapidated foundations of a razed mill building” (Berger 92). While this introduces an element of decay to the scene, the “lake” itself had been recently created as a reservoir by the landowner in order to meet the “industrial requirements” of his “copper rolling mill,” and “*Swimming* is thus overdetermined by industry” (92). The youth, his back turned, is facing right, and apparently contemplating the movement of the diving figure just as he is about to hit the water. Three triangles make up the body of the standing nude. The hand of his left arm is resting on his hip, thereby bending his arm at the elbow to create an arrow-like figure. Albeit angled differently, his right arm

creates a similar geometrical shape. His legs are spread apart, simulating the shape of a fan, or a pyramid.²

Pyramidal structures are of course prevalent in American thought and aesthetics, and this has offered critics a convenient way of reading Eakins' painting. In his seminal *American Renaissance*, Matthiessen says of the painting that, "The design is one of [Eakins'] most concentrated, and almost matches those of the Italian Renaissance in constructing a rhythmical pyramid" (610). This is not just an element of the Italian Renaissance of course; classical painting in general makes ubiquitous use of triangular and pyramidal shapes, and Eakins was in fact a "devoted student" of the seventeenth-century Spanish master, Diego Velázquez, whose works he had closely observed during a six-month trip to Spain in 1870 (Milroy 95). In his famous analysis of Velázquez's *Las Meninas* (plate 2) that makes up the Introduction to *The Order of Things*, Michel Foucault notes how "the painter's sovereign gaze commands a virtual triangle whose outline defines this picture of a picture: at the top—the only visible corner—the painter's eyes; at one of the base angles, the invisible place occupied by the model; at the other base angle, the figure probably sketched out on the invisible surface of the canvas" (5). In his reading of *Las Meninas*, which features the back of a giant canvas facing the viewer, Foucault is concerned to reveal the void, "some residuum" (17), that interrupts the relation between sovereignty and the work of representation itself: "it is not possible for the pure felicity of the image ever to present in a full light both the master who is presenting [Velázquez] and the sovereign who is being represented [King Phillip IV]"

² In *Caravaggio's Secrets*, Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit comment on *St. John the Baptist with a Ram* by the Italian Renaissance painter, Michelangelo Caravaggio. This painting shows us the saint as a naked youth in close contact with a male animal. Bersani and Dutoit say of the composition of the main figure that he is "half-reclining with legs spread and the right arm [is] extending away from us, as if protecting or concealing something" (79). The authors comment on the "fanlike structures in the painting" that are formed variously by "the ram's horns" and "the boy's legs," and this has the effect of creating a tension between centrifugal repulsion and centripetal attraction (81). The fan created by the man's legs in *Swimming* introduces a similar relation between the viewer and the central part of the man's body, his buttocks.

(17). This “residuum” that disrupts the authorial gaze seems to be connected to the “lustreless back” of the canvas—what Foucault calls, “The other side of a psyche” (7). The painting appears, in fact, as a play on the dialectic between depth and surface, front and back: the mirror at the deepest point of the image, representing the king and queen who are otherwise absent from the painting; the canvas, on which the sovereign is presumably being sketched, stands in the front with its back turned towards the viewer. The mirror-image at the back represents the inverse side of the front of the canvas, which is obscure to us—the irony being of course that, while the king and his wife only appear to us in the background of the painting, they are whom everybody else in the scene is facing (15).



Plate 2: Diego Velázquez, *Las Meninas* (ca. 1656).

The ironies that make up the play between different layers, angles, and lines of sight in this paragon of classical representation re-appear in Eakins' *Swimming*. A triangle once again frames our viewing. From the submerged Eakins in the lower right corner to the man "thigh-deep at the edge" of the pier, "The axis rises from the head of [the man spread out on the pier] to the head of [the] standing figure," only to then carry the eye of the viewer, by way of the diving body, "back down into the water again" (Matthiessen 610). Martin A. Berger calls this the "dominant compositional triangle" of the canvas—which the three triangular shapes of the central male nude are minor versions of—binding together the models (93). Eakins, relegated to the far right corner of the canvas, himself an onlooker, diminishes the impact of his own masterly gaze. In contrast to Velázquez, he inhabits a lower base angle of the compositional triangle. *Swimming* can in fact be read as the ironical inversion of *Las Meninas*. The focal point of the compositional triangle, or pyramid—which is further brought into focus by the triangular shapes that make up the pose of the standing man—appears to be a pair of buttocks. In this way, Eakins, in his gentle mockery of sovereign representation, replaces the "lustreless back" of Velázquez's canvas with the lustrous bottom of his central nude. At the same time, Eakins foregrounds the pair of buttocks as a simile of the corridor in *Las Meninas* that, in a "yellow dazzle," like "the curve of a curtain" (Foucault 11), pries apart the shadowy background of the painting. Eakins' aesthetic of "firmness and solidity" (Matthiessen 607) thus allows for the slightly softer flesh of a man's buttocks to assume central importance in his composition.

In *Eakins Revealed*, Henry Adams suggests that, "Buttocks are a major point of interest in Eakins' three most ambitious figure compositions: *The Gross Clinic*, *William Rush*, and *Swimming*" (306). Indeed, in *Swimming*, the standing man's face is completely shaded, and the most prominent part of his body is his buttocks, which, protruding left, are

rendered slightly pink. As in the other two paintings that Adams mentions, in *Swimming*, “the sex of the naked figure is more than slightly ambiguous” (306). This prompts Adams to state that “his painting seems to challenge the usual boundaries between the heterosexual, the homosocial, the homoerotic, and the homosexual. According to this view, we might suppose that Eakins’s sexual identity was unstable, and open to reconstitution and revision” (310). Consequently, as Kathleen A. Foster suggests, “Made at the pinnacle of his powers,” the bold nature of *Swimming* sowed the “seeds” of Eakins’ disaster: his forced resignation in 1886 from the Academy (13).

In a move that distinguishes his reading of *Swimming* from that of Adams, Berger emphasizes the men’s separation from one another on the basis that, “Each man is portrayed with a distinctive head and posture, just as each is absorbed in his own world” (93).³ This leads him to conclude that, “although on its surface the canvas appears to be about nothing but the body, it ultimately challenges reductive definitions of gender that are based solely on man’s corporeality” (97). Berger would thus appear to quibble somewhat with Whitman’s estimation of Eakins’ work, which he sees as erring “‘just a little, just a little—a little—in the direction of the flesh’” (qtd. in Matthiessen 604). The triple repetition of the word, “little,” creates a tripartite understatement that nonetheless reveals Whitman’s investment in Eakins as an artist and friend, whose “work was condemned until after his death to an even greater obscurity of reputation than had befallen *Leaves of Grass*” (Matthiessen 604-5). Whitman’s “obscurity” might, for Matthiessen, be traced to the same “vaguely pathological and homosexual” representational contours that inflected his poetry (535). The ambiguous behind of Eakins’ standing nude hints at the same “passivity” that describes “the poet’s body” in “Song of Myself” (535)—as, for example, after the speaker finds himself used up by his

³ Berger is neglecting to comment on the fact that at least two of the men appear to be focusing on Harry the red setter, and this may lead us to consider the role of the animal in relation to the community of the painting.

divine, “unknown / lovers” (“Proto-Leaf” Stanza 36, ll. 7-8). Matthiessen’s own reputation in the decades following the publication of *American Renaissance* in 1941 became marked by at least three different events: his “persecution by the McCarthy Committee, his suicide in 1950, and his homosexual relationship with painter Russell Cheney” (Shahani 796). As a closeted gay man, he shied away from the full potential of rebirth in Eakins’ painting; he dared not get his feet wet, so to speak. At the same time, the diving figure in *Swimming*, in a tragically ironic way, prophesizes the leap out of a hotel room that ended Matthiessen’s life.

At this moment, I want to linger with the fragmentary dimension of Eakins’ work that Berger gestures toward, since, while the scene might lack a sense of bodily cohesion between the characters, it nevertheless maintains a strong erotic quality that can be placed into a wider figural and historical context that is important to this dissertation. Eakins’ fascination with the rear end of male bodies generates a metaphor for a trope, or literary device, that proves to be especially prevalent in the literature of the mid-nineteenth century: *hysteron proteron*, or the preposterous. Hysteron proteron means that the “last is put first,” and Richard Rand provides us with a simple definition of this figure of speech: “two terms are reversed according to the sequence, the order, temporal, spatial, causal, in which you ordinarily find them” (51). This dissertation will show the pervasiveness of this trope in the literature and poetry of the American Renaissance, as represented by the work of Henry David Thoreau, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Herman Melville. Appearing later in the nineteenth century, Eakins’ painting serves as a provocative summary of this figural tendency in the literary culture at midcentury, as it champions a “rear” view of things in an erotically charged way.

In what follows, I will delineate how preposterousness in the American context is linked to questions of same-sex desire and general “deviancy.” In order to set the theoretical stage for my dissertation, however, I must first show how American preposterousness comes to depend on the rhetorical tradition of Europe in the early modern period.

In early modern rhetoric, *hysteron proteron*, as Patricia Parker points out, “was inseparable from what was known as the ‘preposterous’, a reversal of ‘post’ for ‘pre’, behind for before, back for front, second for first, and end or sequel for beginning” (“*Hysteron Proteron: or the Preposterous*” 133). As she notes elsewhere, occurrences of the preposterous can “range from reversal of the proper ordering of male and female to transgressions of the linear ordering of grammar and discourse, from violations of sumptuary laws [...] to [...] social disruptions” (“*Preposterous Events*” 188). In relation to the latter, she cites the exaltation of lowly persons to the level of noblemen (188). The most commonplace denotation for *hysteron proteron* is “putting the cart before the horse” (“*Hysteron Proteron: or the Preposterous*” 135), but, in general, it is used as “a figure for the topsy turvy or arsy-versy” (138). In linguistics, *hysteron proteron* normally appears to be defined “based on a purely syntactic notion,” which stipulates that, as Paolo Valesio points out, “any change in the order of two or more constituents within a sentence, with respect to some order or these constituents conceived of as the basic or normal, constitutes an HP [*hysteron proteron*]” (212); specifically, this concerns the “backward or left-oriented movement of the second constituent [e.g., the verb phrase]” (215), influencing the “naturalness” of language in a negative way (216). As a rhetorical scheme, *hysteron proteron* has to do with the “surface structure” of language (218), and primarily concerns the switching of verb and noun phrases

in a sentence,⁴ placing words preposterously (see Parker, “Preposterous Events” 190). It is no accident that hysteron proteron, or the preposterous, appears on the English scene at a time when “the new orders of humanist discipline” are taking hold (189). Parker explains that “learning to write,” for example

was literally a matter of following a “Coppie” or original, from individual letters and the sequence of the alphabet to grammar and syntax, the arrangement of sentences, and the ordering of an entire discourse—a structure of literacy whose linear bias was reinforced by the heightened linearity and “rule” of print. (189)

In a culture where literacy had only recently emerged (Parker, “Preposterous Reversals” 461), the threat of the preposterous followed.⁵ In turn, the preposterous became “a term for disorder in discourse, [and] condemnations of ‘preposterous’ inversion appear repeatedly in the texts of an emerging neoclassical orthodoxy devoted to order, decorum, and proper sequence” (“Preposterous Events” 190). The preposterous thus inflects spatial and temporal registers equally. Disordered grammar and syntax furthermore came to be related to “gender and [...] social place” (191). One would then be guilty of setting the cart before the horse, if one were to place “‘mother’ before ‘father’ or ‘woman’ before ‘man’ (191). What is more, as Parker points out in her analysis of Shakespeare’s *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, “rhetorical and poetic ‘turning’ is associated by the men [of the play], as by long-standing masculinist tradition, with the turning, varying, and inconstancy of women” (“Preposterous Reversals” 459).

⁴ Valesio’s study is thus primarily concerned with how “the shift of the final Verb Phrase backwards in between the preceding series of Noun Phrases can be functional to the obtainment of a more varied structure in a long compound sentence” (221).

⁵ In relation to nineteenth-century America, a similar point might be made concerning the preoccupation of Noah Webster to instate a properly American idiom with the publication of his dictionary. Could we therefore say that the prevalence of the preposterous in American culture of the mid-nineteenth century occurred as a response to recent changes in the language on the level of syntax and grammar? However fascinating, this argument will not be pursued in this dissertation, as it falls outside the purview of my current research.

The preposterous “denotes not just a reversal of back for front in an explicitly sexual context but also an inversion of the ‘right writing’ of Nature” (“Preposterous Events” 192-93). Indeed, as Valesio points out, *hysteron proteron* is generally used to shift the emphasis of a sentence by means of a backward, or “unnatural,” movement. Consider the two following examples from the medieval troubadour Jaufré Rudel and the Portuguese sixteenth-century poet Luís de Camões, respectively: “I have many male teachers of song around me, and many female teachers”; “His body naked, and his private parts / in order not to be slowed down in swimming” (qtd. in Valesio 220). The constituents of these sentences are reversed in significant ways to “front” the male elements, but whereas this logic seems to be in line with the dictum of putting “male” before “female,” the disordered syntax and the effeminate or homoerotic content of the examples renders the language preposterous. The temporal disciplining of Western pedagogy and linguistics is thus intimately related to “the phobic myths that variously deem homosexuality a form of regression, a violation of narrative form, a case of arrested development, a threat to futurity, and a ‘bad copy’ of heterosexual love” (Rohy 67).

As a more general trope, the preposterous can appear in many linguistic and visual guises. Understood in this way, we see how the “passive” backside of the male body in Eakins’ painting is presented in such a way as to bring full attention to the buttocks, and celebrates the ambiguity of the masculine form in relation to the instability of the gender binary. The preposterous enacts a *mise-en-abyme* in which the posterior is mirrored in the anterior, each becoming a backward-turned image of the other. As I will explore in more detail later, the preposterous is historically related to homosexuality. For example, in a seminal text of the psychoanalytic tradition, homosexuals are said to be particularly disposed towards a preposterous view of the male body. Accordingly, Sándor Ferenczi wagers that the

homosexual is able to locate distinctly feminine contours on his partner's back-turned body: "the posterior half of a man's body can signify for him the anterior half of a woman's, the scapulae or nates assuming the significance of the woman's breasts" (*Sex in Psycho-analysis* 261).

Jonathan Goldberg sees preposterousness as specifically involving "questions of sexual decorum" (*Sodometries* 4), and he notes how it marks a rhetorical switch-point between what is considered licit and illicit. It is not simply that sodomy denotes an affinity for anal sex, but the point is rather that, historically, "it is mobilized in the face of threats to the social order," and, thus, "the term cannot be collapsed into a synonym for homosexuality" (Goldberg, *Reclaiming Sodom* 5). As Cameron McFarlane further notes, "Inversion [...] is the structuring principle [...] that holds together what can otherwise be quite disparate depictions" (34). Goldberg points out that sodomy—"making preposterous the act of Venus"—became an important trope by which European anxieties concerning sexuality and power in colonial America were framed ("Sodomy in the New World" 5). The inherently confusing or incoherent nature of sodomy proves to be productive for Goldberg, as it allows him to mobilize a rhetorically rich reading of American history that emphasizes the extent to which the New World was queerly imagined. Similarly, in "New England Sodom" Michael Warner proposes a reparative reading of Puritan contractarian theology that aims to show how "the rhetoric of the city on the hill," rather than unequivocally supporting a "homophobic and heterosexist" agenda, perhaps against itself imagines the possibility of a covenant modeled on same-sex affection and attraction (351). The rhetorically driven historicism of Goldberg and Warner engages in what Susan McGabe defines as "a critical trend of locating 'identifications' (rather than identity), modes of being and having, in historical contexts" (120). In this way, queer historicism "arises out of a desire to analyze and

situate historical texts as cultural material, fusing the work of excavation with the recognition that sexualities are socially constructed and can take multiple forms” (121). One form sexuality might take is as a figure of speech, and language itself, as Lee Edelman has shown, contains a vast and intricate “circuit” of desire that is inseparable from linguistic expression (*Homographesis* xvi).

The main function of *hysteron proteron*, while pointing to “backwardness” in general, is to *upset* the proper arrangement of things. However, *hysteron proteron*, in relation to temporality, is not merely concerned with disrupting the linear norm of chronology, but the turn backward may be prompted by an interest in turning forward—“fronting” the illicit, or exposing that which otherwise does not bear exposure to the light of day. The colloquial connotation of preposterousness appears always to be negatively used to describe something that is so incomprehensibly ridiculous as to render description impossible; in this way, it functions as an exclamation to mark one’s rejection of or disgust with what is going on. Drawing on a number of early modern sources, Goldberg nevertheless states that while the preposterous involves “questions of sexual decorum”—in the sense that “reversing before and behind could mean crossing over the boundary that separates licit from illicit behavior”—“it might as easily be a question managed by those who do it all the time, and have the capacity to make such transgressions seem utterly ordinary” (*Sodometries* 4). Goldberg’s insight concerns the way in which the content of sodomy “can be delivered only through what is said (or what is not), through slippages capable of being mobilized in more than one direction” (xv). The word “sodometry,” a synonym for sodomy “from around 1540 to around 1650” (xv), names this process, in that, as a textual vector (Goldberg exploits the geometrical connotation of the word), it tends to “spread[] uncontrollably, violating borders and differences—upside down, inside out, animal/human” (xvi). This dissertation will

delineate the different ways that this kind of textual sodomy comes to bear on the American context, while, on the other hand, seeking to showcase the “positive” uses of the preposterous, which differ from what Goldberg indicates by the term sodometry, carrying the weight of a judgment or a negation (xv).

The preposterous appears in many different forms and in many different contexts in both aesthetic and theoretical traditions in ways that are not directly sexual. For example, Walter Benjamin’s perhaps most famous allegorical figure, the angel of history, is described as progressing towards the future only reluctantly, back turned, observing the ruins of the past as they pile on, while, simultaneously, presenting his behind to the future as a point of vulnerability.⁶ What impels the preposterous? What drives the initial turning from front to back? In relation to Benjamin, we might say that he stages the preposterous as an indictment against the type of liberal historiography that tends to “put the horse before the cart;” the folly of modern, democratic man, according to Benjamin, is that he believes that the current with which he is being borne constitutes progress. This is a conservative use of the preposterous, and I am more interested in what the trope can “do” in the other direction—as a means of emphasizing the strange and crooked narratives that work against the linearity of teleology. We might thus say, provisionally, that the preposterous is expressive of an excess already inherent to the normative side of things. Like *verlan*, the French slang form, the

⁶ The passage from the ninth of “The Theses on the Philosophy of History” reads: “Where we perceive a chain of events, [the angel of history] sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress” (257-58).

preposterous as a method or theoretical apparatus to some extent systematizes inversion (*verlan* is a “metathesis of *l’envers* ‘reverse,’ e.g. *l’envers* > *versl’en* > *verlan*” [Lefkowitz 312]).⁷ But for all that, like *verlan*—talking back—the preposterous maintains a certain anarchic or unmanageable “side,” which is also the seat of its creative force. (In fact, we can see *verlan* adopting a localized, syntactical version of the preposterous, as what Natalie J. Lefkowitz calls “syllable metathesis” [314]). The retroactive or resistant impetus of hysteron proteron thus carries with it the abject and untimely.

Despite being considered a “rare” and “odd trope” (Weisenburger 87), hysteron proteron appears with surprising frequency in Western letters and art. While the preposterous in its strictly rhetorical form of hysteron proteron is located historically in the early modern period, when we transpose it into a contemporary theoretical network we come to realize that it in fact shares not a few traits with postmodernity. Steven Weisenburger has estimated that the device “appears some fifty-nine times” in Thomas Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow*, for example. While it “crops up but four times” in Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five*, this novel shows how it can be used to convey a powerful sense of “temporal malfunction,” as “an allied bombing of Germany [is narrated] in reverse, right down to the guns (‘tubes’) that extract (‘suck’) bullets from American pilots and airplanes” (88).⁸ Based on these twentieth-century examples, one might argue, then, that hysteron proteron is particularly amenable to a modernist or postmodernist aesthetic. This dissertation, however, will show that preposterousness is foundational to what, *avec* Matthiessen, is typically referred to as the quintessential period of American literature: the American Renaissance. The preposterous might be less *syntactically* prevalent in the works of this period—which is not to say that we

⁷ Natalie J. Lefkowitz further notes the political aspect of *verlan*, as “it is a small scale symbol of revolt. Speaking backwards becomes a metaphor of opposition, of talking back” (318).

⁸ Here we should mention Martin Amis’ 1991 novel *Times Arrow*, which narrates a life totally backwards, from death to inception.

cannot find examples of this—than in the excessively self-conscious literature of the latter half of the twentieth century. But the preposterous, as I primarily locate it in the works of Thoreau, Melville, and Hawthorne, is important to trace to the middle of the nineteenth century, since it is tied up with the ethical provenances of American queerness—past, present, and future. In effect, this discussion impacts the discourse of “newness” that is often called upon in relation to this period in American culture. Early modern rhetoric appears so far removed from the American context that to encounter hysteron proteron at all in these writers in a strange way gives it an air of newness. We will thus see how preposterousness appears on the rhetorical level in the form of hysteron proteron and on the larger thematic level in the texts of Thoreau, Melville, and Hawthorne.

But it is Ralph Waldo Emerson who provides us with a gateway to the preposterous in American literature. This may strike the reader as a curious statement. Was it not Emerson who said in “The American Scholar” address that, impugning the intellectual institutions of his time, “They look backward and not forward. But genius looks forward. The eyes of man are set in his forehead, not in his hindhead. Man hopes. Genius creates” (*Collected Works* 1:57)? However, moving from the “degenerate state” of society, “in which the members have suffered amputation from the trunk, and strut about so many walking monsters,—a good finger, a neck, a stomach, an elbow, but never a man” (53), to achieve the ideal of “Man Thinking” one must shun “noxious” tradition by turning away from the norm. Emerson accomplishes this through what Stanley Cavell has called his “aversive thinking” (*Philosophical Passages* 13). As Cavell explains, this phrase “alludes to a sentence of Emerson’s from ‘Self-Reliance’” (13). This is the sentence Cavell has in mind: “Self-Reliance is [the] aversion [of conformity]” (Emerson 2:29). Since society demands conformity of its members, Cavell reasons, this must mean that Emerson’s “writing and his

society incessantly recoil from, or turn away from one another; but since this is incessant, the picture is at the same time of each incessantly turning *toward* the other” (13). Emersonian thinking is marked by “transfiguration” and “conversion” (13), and this leads Cavell to encapsulate it in the following way: “To think is to turn around, or to turn back [...], the words of ordinary life (hence the present forms of our lives) that now repel thought, disgust it” (14). The “self-inflation” of Emerson’s prose that upon first reading Cavell judged “preposterous” (98) has now come to seem proper, and “every word [has] found its place” (99). The previous judgment “of imprecision and inaccuracy” that apparently had characterized Cavell’s early reading of Emerson in time “became so ludicrous that the judgment was turned against myself, and it was my resistance that came under scrutiny” (99). In other words, he came to apply the dictum of “aversive thinking” to himself, as he turned back, or placed on its head, his earlier estimation of Emerson. Cavell’s definition of aversive thinking, then, lends us another description of the preposterous: turning away from even the most contradictory logic will eventually bring us face to face with it, and prioritize what had been deemed to be opposite the mandated order of things—nonconformity in Emerson’s case. The enigma of the preposterous is that it never ceases to reverse its own reversals. Disclosing the rear eclipses the front, which then comes to stand in an unequal position; but in order not to domesticate the rear, this process must continue. A preposterous hermeneutics would therefore need to suspend this movement long enough to make *sense* of each position, in order to realize fully what McFarlane calls the “possibility of inversion” (34).

“[T]he founding of American thinking” (Cavell 15) gestures towards a certain openness, which concomitantly encourages a preposterous logic. However, it seems that for Emerson rendering preposterous the order of things, or being “alive to the ludicrous,” as John Bryant puts it (42), only hints at the recognized need for a reconstruction. Emerson is simply

concerned to reinstate the proper, cosmic order of things, such that it existed in the beginning before the implementation of the social contract. Nevertheless, the “incessant” turning of aversion, from front to back and vice versa, would mean that no sense of hegemony can ever be achieved. Combine this with the idea that thinking is haunted by an “unfathomable” strangeness (which, for Emerson, is related to “the death of his son”), and “the idea of approaching the world comes through a kind of mourning for it,” as a consequence (Cavell 97). Emersonian thinking, hence, as Branka Arsić points out, “emerges out of a profound crisis” (*On Leaving* 142). “[I]rreparable loss” is thus coterminous with thinking, “confronting us with a risk of personal crisis such as Emerson equates with the loss of a child or lover. Our growth is therefore elegiac” (142). This mournful strangeness translates, for Cavell, to a “sense of irreality” in Emerson, which “is specified as a loss of the direction in which reality is to be found, that it is not ahead” (94). In this instance, it is fascinating to note that Emerson, preoccupied with the loss of his son, “came by 1844 to question the shibboleth (or at least the metaphor) of depth” (Faflik, “Deep Thought, Shallow Aesthetic” 72), which had otherwise been central to his romantic aesthetic. Quoting from Emerson’s essay on “Experience,” David Faflik suggests that,

For Emerson “true art” inheres in our facility for level “perception” along life’s “slippery sliding surfaces.” We reach this receptive position (a position of readerly reception) by resisting the inflexible recourse to depth. At-hand existence might “glimmer” with a unique meaning all its own, should we read it right. (73)

“Aversive thinking” namely promotes the “flexibility” of thought to interrogate the preference, for example, of depth over surface as a paradigmatic metaphor of Romanticism, for which “the deepest of meanings is buried in the semiobscurity of ‘shadow’” (Faflik, “Deep Thought” 66). In Arsić’s reading of Emerson, she goes on to suggest that to the extent

that “risk” is crucial to thinking—to the production of the new—it must involve the “unnamable,” the “unthought,” or the “nonconceptual” (143). This opens thought up to the “devastating” power of the “abyss” (143). Arsić identifies here what we might call a certain fecundity of the void. For Arsić, the abyss leads to new perceptions, but I am interested in determining the figurative import of the abyss and what it can “do” even further. As the abyss does not simply “devastate” thought—it creates new images of and for thought—I want to consider, in the analyses to follow, how and what kind of new figural relations may grow out of the darkness. What might be glimpsed as we, like Nietzsche, “stare[] into the unfathomable” void of existence (*Birth of Tragedy* 55)?

This dissertation explores nineteenth-century American queerness through a reflection of the particular trope of the preposterous. The preposterous is found to be at work in the *oeuvres* of all three authors under consideration: Thoreau, Melville, Hawthorne—sometimes explicitly, but at other times the argument will allude to the preposterous in more implicit ways. As we have noted, critics tend to relegate the scope of the preposterous to the early modern period, in which it is linked to a “horizontal structure,” and “the overturning of traditional bodily and social hierarchies, top for bottom, head for posterior” (Masten, “Is the Fundament a Grave?” 132); in this regard, we should also note the inversion of the mind/body dualism so central to Western thought (see Parker, “Preposterous Reversals” 475), and the preposterous thus almost becomes synonymous with the body. Theories of the preposterous have centered soma-rhetorically on the anus, or the confusion of anal and

vaginal orifices.⁹ Anality encompasses both function and pleasure, which *can* come together in different sexual acts, such as coprophilia. In the same way that a concern with the anus does not necessarily lead to an excremental vision,¹⁰ privileging the preposterous is not simply to embrace the desirability of male homosexual relations—although this of course informs my thesis to some extent. While encompassing queer desires, the preposterous extends beyond this, as it concerns deviance *in general*. My argument therefore suggests that due to cultural and aesthetic limitations, deviant positions at the middle of the nineteenth century in America were not able to find expression except in preposterous ways.

Hence, what impels my study is the mobility of the preposterous. While it can be traced to the Renaissance, it is by no means confined to any specific place or time, although it most frequently appears in conjunction with allegations of sodomy. In *Sodometries*, Goldberg asserts that sodomy is less a “temporary aberration,” as Foucault otherwise claimed in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, and that it can be “mapped” and “traced” to “sites of present confusion” “precisely because the term remains incapable of exact definition” (*Sodometries* 18). The preposterous itself, as a trope, can *obviously* be defined, but the confusions that it engenders may prove more difficult to fix according to a binary ordering. For example, Goldberg shows how “buggery” between members of William Bradford’s Puritan congregation in the New World could not fail to be addressed not only for fear of contamination, but Bradford’s condemnation of this abominable sin became “the

⁹ See, for instance, Will Stockton’s *Playing Dirty: Sexuality and Waste in Early Modern Comedy*, in which the author analyzes “early modern and psychoanalytic constructions of the anus as a dually erotic and excretory orifice” (xiv), as well as how “the discourse of sodomy conflates and confuses the anus and the vagina, female and male bodies, and threatens sexual difference” (xix). The preposterous for Stockton is most clearly related to “the dead-end erotics of improper alliance and temporal perversion” (54); however, I will show in this dissertation that the preposterous need not spell death, but that it produces a number of productive figural and ethical detours that circumvent the normative demands of nineteenth century American culture.

¹⁰ In *Double Talk*, for example, Wayne Koestenbaum says the following: “I assume that to privilege the anus (to turn the world upside down) is not simply to embrace Jonathan Swift’s ‘excremental vision’ [see Norman O. Brown, *Life Against Death*], but to admit the desirability of male homosexual relations” (19).

dense site of a series of crossings and displacements” (238). Preposterousness, in this instance, is seen to engender the tropes of chiasmus and metonymy equally. The disruptive qualities of the preposterous likewise, then, lead us to consider its connection to other figures of speech, as this thesis, among other things, hopes to show.

Furthermore, the preposterous is surreptitiously at work in the conception of “rebirth” that is central to Matthiessen’s *American Renaissance*, which has come to be seen as the inauguration of what we now know as American Studies; Nishant Shahani even refers to this work as the “primal scene” of the field. In his article, “The Politics of Queer Time: Retro-Sexual Returns to the Primal Scene of American Studies,” Shahani puts the issue thusly: “By returning to and rethinking the primal scene of American Studies, I wish to suggest that it casts the discipline in a chain of historicity that restructures its intellectual boundaries” (794). If *American Renaissance* sought to claim a timeless space of American literature by canonizing Emerson, Melville, Thoreau, Hawthorne, and Whitman, it could only do so, Shahani argues, by repudiating the excesses of content and style that might interfere with the image of a coherent “‘native’ American literary tradition” (796). Shahani never defines his use of “primal scene” in relation to the “compulsory heterosexuality” that is said to be foundational of American Studies (800) other than to claim that it negated “the discipline’s queer potentialities” (801). Discussing Donald Pease’s *American Renaissance Reconsidered*, Shahani points out that, in a performative way, “the term ‘renaissance’ offers the promise of ideological renewal and regeneration through the repro-normative equation of ‘birth’ with ‘cultural achievement’” (803). At this point, I want to unpack the connotations of “primal scene,” in order to show that within the paradigm of psychoanalysis the primary phantasm of development is shot through with “queer potentialities,” of which the preposterous gains a prominent place.

The trope of hysteron proteron shares more than an alliterative connection to the notion of *proton pseudos* in psychoanalysis: “a first—specifically: hysterical—lie” (Laplanche, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis* 33). Jean Laplanche explains that this term is endemic to Freud’s theory of hysteria, in which imagination is taken for reality, and desire is translated into reality, “according to specific laws of transposition” (34). Central to the “hysterical lie” is that “what is called a ‘primal fantasy’ of seduction, [one’s] own desire to seduce the father has been translated, in inverse form, into an actual scene of seduction *by* the father” (34). We need not mention the many problematic analyses this notion lead Freud to conceive of; however, as Laplanche notes, “something other than a subjective lie is being invoked; at stake [with the term *proton pseudos*] is a transition from the subjective to a grounding, perhaps even to a transcendental, dimension,” which Laplanche refers to as a “primal deceit” (34). This has to do with the theory of repression—something that psychoanalysis sees as inherent to the human condition—and this leads to the establishment of the term “elaboration,” which concerns the “associative connections permitting a linking of an excessively ‘charged’ memory to other memories and ideas, thus englobing it in a mental flux in which its charge is progressively distributed and diluted” (34). Interestingly, the notion of “elaboration” has led to the staging of “total conceptual and chronological disorder” from within the field of psychoanalysis (45). Laplanche mentions Melanie Klein in this regard, who “speaks, for example, of an oral incorporation of the penis” as occurring fantasmatically during the Oedipal stage. Klein’s “fantasmatic detour” (46), even as it “plays havoc with our accepted ideas: not only with our Freudian dogmas, but with our ‘common

sense” (45-46), nevertheless encapsulates the basic understanding of “psychical reality:” the idea that there is no innocent “before” of sexuality (47). This leads Laplanche, then, to note that

the meaning of *pseudos*—lie or fallacy—is *also* that the ego is outmaneuvered, taken from behind as by some ruse of war. The *proton pseudos* is also that ruse: the ego is taken from the side on which it “didn’t expect it”; it is overcome, disarmed, subjected to the drive process, that primary process against which, however, it was in its entirety, *constituted*. (47)

Laplanche here details what we might call the primary ravishing of the ego, which can only come into being through a “confused” and “monstrous” path (45).

Psychoanalysis thrives on confusing, or displacing, different orifices to the extent that they all have the capacity to account for similar sexual aims. It is this foundational strain in psychoanalysis that I conflate with my theoretical apparatus. Human desire is figured as promiscuous, to the extent that it is linked to “a certain kind of power, the human power not exactly to satisfy desire but to see a desire everywhere, to be thrilled by the universal representation of that which it lacks” (Bersani, “Psychoanalysis and the Aesthetic Subject” 144). And it is this basic fact of the human condition that influences the psychoanalytical choice of tropes: metaphor and metonymy, which I claim, however, are both over- and underdetermined by the preposterous. The relational difference between psychoanalysis and sodomy can be recognized here: while the former gains its specificity with reference to the source (the drive) that connects the different bodily orifices, the latter is defined by its lack of specificity, as Goldberg points out. Sodomy, thus, can refer to “oral or anal sex, performed by ‘mankind’ or with an animal” (*Sodometries* 3). Apparently, in the sixteenth century, male prostitutes were sometimes referred to as “dogs,” and the sodomitical act is consequently

fused with animality (139). In colonial America, bestiality and sodomy were more or less synonymous, but the former seemed uncannier due to the fear that it would produce “monstrous offspring” (239). Human offender and animal were punished equally for this “interspecies crime” (239), although the animal could hardly have consented to the act.

Furthermore, psychoanalysis employs *hysteron proteron* freely in order to account for the operations of the symptom. In a particularly compelling passage, Freud outlines the confusing nature of the mind: “it is a hierarchy of superordinated and subordinated agents, a labyrinth of impulses striving independently of one another towards action, corresponding with the multiplicity of instincts and of relations with the outer world, many of which are antagonistic to one another and incompatible” (*CP* 4:352). Moreover, in the famous case study of the patient known as the “Rat Man,” Freud provides us with evidence to suggest that *hysteron proteron* should be considered a foremost trope of the unconscious, which, according to Freud’s study, must be regarded as “the precise contrary of the conscious” (*SE* 10:180). Calling attention to the frequent “*suicidal impulses*” of his patient brought about by “a longing for his absent lady” (187), Freud shows how the obsessive mind transforms ““murderous passions”” into a command to kill himself (188); the passage from “unconscious fit” to “consciousness” is “accompanied by the most violent affect and *in a reverse order*—the punitive command coming first, and the mention of the guilty outburst afterwards” (188). There is no “natural” corollary between a symptom and what causes it, of course; the effect, the symptom, typically asks us to locate the cause retroactively. This reversal of temporality in psychoanalysis occurs when the truth of the symptom finds its proper place in the Symbolic Order, and the analyst, in the service of *abreaction*, can then ask us to elaborate on what came before *after*, but which is really *after* before. *Hysteron proteron* namely “foregrounds the idea of causality by disrupting it” (Weisenburger 87). In this way, a daring

soul might term Nietzsche's *The Will to Power* a study in the preposterous;¹¹ hence, insofar as Freud is a Nietzschean (see *The Interpretation of Dreams* in the *Standard Edition* 4:330 and, especially, 5:549), it is not surprising that, in order to explain the hysterical symptom, he should make ample use of hysteron proteron, and in ways that are remarkably close to the rhetorical tradition of the Renaissance that also surfaced in Cavell's reading of Emerson.

The preposterous includes a rejection of "heterotemporality" (Stockton, *Playing Dirty* xiii), by affirming what Freud called *nachträglichkeit* (*après-coup* in Laplanche), which we can provisionally translate as "afterwardness." *Nachträglichkeit*, as "what is later is earlier" (Eickhoff 1461), is in effect a hysteron proteron; its logic is preposterous through and through. But the preposterous does not stop with temporality. The fecundity of the concept is such that it allows us to interrogate a number of reversals and inversions, the latter of which emphasizes the spatial component of the preposterous. As such, a critique of heterospatiality is at stake here as well. To an extent, we can say that the "front" is a reaction-formation of the "posterior," meaning that the latter is the unthought of the former. But at the same time, the rear seduces the front, and the preposterous, conceptually speaking, is the condensed symbol of this process. Psychoanalysis can be referred to as a preposterous science, in that it locates its primary impetus in the regressive energy of the unconscious.¹² My theoretical apparatus thus combines psychoanalysis with the Renaissance rhetoric of the preposterous.

¹¹ In book three, for example, Nietzsche says that, "everything of which we become conscious is a terminal phenomenon, an end—and causes nothing; every successive phenomenon in consciousness is completely atomistic—And we have sought to understand the world through the reverse conception—as if nothing were real and effective but thinking, feeling, willing!" (265). And on page 284: "That which becomes conscious is involved in causal relations which are entirely withheld from us—the sequence of thoughts, feelings, ideas in consciousness does not signify that this sequence is a causal sequence; but apparently it is so, to the highest degree. Upon this appearance we have founded our whole idea of spirit, reason, logic, etc. (—none of these exist: they are fictitious syntheses and unities), and projected these into things and behind things!" Nietzsche's text goes against the Aristotelian dictum of effect following cause, and as Patricia Parker has pointed out, this is tied to "the new humanism in England," which instituted a pedagogy of "rectitude" ("Preposterous Events" 190, 189).

¹² We should not forget to add here Freud's famously provocative assertion in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that "everything living dies for *internal* reasons—becomes organic once again—[and] then we shall be

This dissertation will affirm “the cultural persistence of psychoanalysis, its discontinuous durability in the face of numerous death knells, resistances, domestications, and deformations” (Dean, “Perversion, Sublimation, and Aesthetics” 155). It is especially the various *dis-* and *de-* elements of psychoanalysis that I consider instructive for my reading of the American Renaissance. Psychoanalysis chafes against the modern impetus of progress, and this is perhaps the tenet of psychoanalysis that queer theory finds the most compelling; to a large extent, even, this is what *drives* queer psychoanalysis. It is namely Freud’s drive-theory that Dean calls attention to in this context, which he contrasts with the evolutionary notion of “instinct”: “Instinct serves the species, but drive does not” (157). And he goes on: “drive is antithetical to progress and development; it cannot be assimilated to any developmental theory of subjectivity or sexuality, but functions instead as an obstacle to whatever might be deemed progress” (157). Eckart Goebel indeed suggests that “this is the theoretical basis for [Freud’s] brusque rejection of the idea of an historical teleology” (125). He goes on to state that “the drive is a teleologically blind absolute, ineluctable in the sense that, as a continual urging, it cannot itself be ‘switched off’” (125). Ironically, the very unproductiveness of the drive—its “excessive ‘inhuman’ vitality” (Santner, *On Creaturely Life* 191)—is what separates “us” from the animal world; this is the basis of Freudian anthropocentrism. The drive belongs to the “depths” “beyond the exercise of the unconscious” (Lacan, *Ethics of Psychoanalysis* 90). Like drive (*Trieb* in the original German, *dérive* in French) itself, the *raison d’être* of psychoanalysis is “its uncoordinated insistence” (Dean, “Perversion, Sublimation, and Aesthetics” 158) that we nevertheless somehow must make sense of in various ways. In Freud, sense reflects non-sense. Similarly, we can conceptualize the preposterous as being inhabited by a screen that cuts off *pre-* from *post-*

compelled to say that ‘*the aim of all life is death*’ and, looking backwards, that ‘*inanimate things existed before living ones*’” (SE 18:38).

while reflecting each in the other. The back is a phantom of the front and vice versa; and, in a sense, we can therefore say that both directionalities are subject to hysterical conversion. We find ourselves in the middle, “placed between two almost parallel mirrors: on each side the image is reproduced, back and front, in an indefinite series” (Leclaire, *Psychoanalyzing* 2). In effect, neither *pre-* nor *post-* can be privileged, both on syntactical and figural grounds. In a related way, we can say that each term is “recombined” with the other; that an analysis of the preposterous can never disassociate from either *pre-* or *post-*: like America itself—which in the middle of the nineteenth century remains caught in defining its future perpetually against what came before and was left behind in the old world—the preposterous is always relational. We are here reminded of *Las Meninas*, the painting by Velázquez that Foucault deals with in intimate detail in the Introduction of *The Order of Things*. The “lustreless,” “ironic canvas” of the artist, Velázquez, occupies the foreground, while the ostensible subject of the painting only appears in a minor position in the background (7). What has now become the backside of the canvas, in which we may otherwise “apprehend ourselves [...] as though in a mirror” thus faces off with another inverted image, that of the king and queen (7). This is a visual metaphor of the confusions that the preposterous puts into play, and Foucault’s analysis does little to divest these confusions of their power.

I like to imagine that psychoanalysis occupies the posterior side to my primary texts, and that the “preposterousnesses” of psychoanalysis might in turn be relegated to the front of the matter in such a way as to account for the preposterous in American literature; as such, even as psychoanalytic terminology does not always figure prominently in the chapters to

come (with the exception of Chapter 3), my understanding of American preposterousness is nonetheless heavily influenced by the work of Freud, Lacan, and Laplace, especially. If “Queer Studies [...] figure as present at the start of American Studies, as always part of the unconscious of American Studies” (Abelove 69), we might be tempted to read not only *American Renaissance* but the entirety of the critical canon as being somewhat symptomatic of a certain ahistorical queerness. The cause of the symptom is always rendered retroactively, and, paradoxically—or, rather, preposterously—it appears as temporally posterior to the symptom itself. Is this to say, subsequently, that queer readings of the American Renaissance disingenuously presume to discover the latent “code” of an unconscious system that has already been applied to the text retroactively? Here we might quote Slavoj Žižek’s insight that, concerning the European Renaissance,

the new zeitgeist had to constitute itself by literally *presupposing itself in its exteriority*, in its external conditions (in antiquity). In other words, it was not sufficient for the new zeitgeist retroactively to posit these external conditions (the antique tradition) as “its own,” it had to (presup)pose itself as already present in these conditions. (*Tarrying with the Negative* 147)

There is of course a danger of simply transposing current terminology and markers of identification onto the texts of a previous era, but, I would argue, queer psychoanalysis is not synonymous with anachronism.¹³ Borrowing a turn of phrase from Erin Felicia Labbie, I suggest that we see American Studies and queer psychoanalysis as being “*mutually implicated*” (10) from the beginning. Preposterousness is similar to anachronism but yet differs in important ways: the preposterous has a rich rhetorical history, and it cannot simply

¹³ Anachronism should not necessarily be read negatively in this regard. Valerie Rohy has recently examined the ways in which the charge of anachronism in academic circles can be traced to a homophobic discourse. As she puts it in the article “Ahistorical,” “straight hegemony must represent anachronism as deviance in order to displace the burden of the ahistorical onto others—queers and people of color, each differently stigmatized as ‘primitive’—and to claim for itself the role of truth, not falsification, the path of progress, not regression” (68).

be boiled down to “backwardness.” This introduction in part serves to elaborate on this history and how it finds expression in the American Renaissance.

My project locates itself somewhat anxiously within the so-called New American Studies. Studies of this ilk, according to Robyn Wiegman’s article, “The Ends of New Americanism,” strive to cultivate

identificatory investments in objects of study whose historical relation to “America” is marked by subordination, exploitation, abjection, and disdain—objects whose seeming exteriority to the exceptionalist dramas of both U.S. nationalism and its imperialist imaginary provide a different “map” of the terrain of the field and engage the kind of affective attachments that are disallowed by the commitment to critique.
(391)

The way this can be done is by elaborating a method of “retrospective reanimation,” in order to “discern what possibilities in the past have been lost to the present that could inspire left critical and political struggle for a democratic future yet to come” (400). Queer readings of the American archive participate in this impetus. By attending to the rhetorical question of Whitman’s “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry”—“What is it then between us?”—Peter Coviello’s book *Intimacy in America* locates “the first rumblings of a major conceptual shift” at midcentury, concerning “a gradually more intense scrutiny of the nature of any attachment, of its qualities, its extensions, and, eventually, its propriety” (8). The framing of intimacy at this point in American history, Coviello argues, can be boiled down to “one basic measure: the presence or absence of sexual intent, of *desire*” (8). Coviello’s history of “American sexual ideology” (8) attends to different examples of “the dream of an intimate nationality” in relation to how white masculinity was variously solidified and challenged in different ways in the middle of the nineteenth century. Coviello’s book anticipates Cindy Weinstein

and Christopher Looby's recent collection, *American Literature's Aesthetic Dimensions*,¹⁴ in that the author insists on "[a]ttending closely to the ground-level idiosyncrasies of idiom, syntax, and structure" (14) in the work of Poe, Melville, and Whitman. These "readerly procedures" are not antithetical to historicism as such—close reading is itself a historical method, Coviello claims (16)—but they do present "one strong way to resist the potentially flattening effects of contextualization" (14) and the "now-habituated movements of Americanist new historicism" (13). I thus find compelling and instructive his provocative, and "untimely" (in the best Nietzschean sense), commitment to reading texts closely. He nevertheless seems devoted to teasing out the "affiliative bonds" (11), or "affective coherence" (10), that surface between the three authors he deals with *despite* the fractured and disjointed reality of the antebellum period.

Coviello's study is indeed historicist, as it seeks to intervene in the narrative of nationality. His method is founded on establishing the "fraught and 'thick'" "relations between text and context," as "it is precisely at the level of words, in their smallest arrangements, that the deep particularity of any author's engagement with the salient languages of his or her day most meaningfully expresses itself" (14). Depth translates into surface for Coviello as the "thick" texture of language turns fluid in the moment it addresses itself to the discourse on nationality. The question of nationality appears inescapable based on Coviello's reading. But what might a reading of antebellum texts that refuses the meta-narrative of nationality look like? What of the textures and "play[s] of relations" that have nothing to do with "*identification*" (11), understood in relation to the "enforced cathexis" that

¹⁴ In the introduction to *American Literature's Aesthetic Dimensions*, Cindy Weinstein and Christopher Looby point out that in recent years the "aesthetic dimension" of American Studies has been neglected in favor of "a politically engaged historicism," in order to compensate for the ostensibly "dangerous and morally blameworthy evasion of history and political reality" (1); however, in turn, "this dismissal has come to seem...limiting or deforming to critical inquiry and scholarly investigation—and so it comes about that aesthetic questions return to the critical conversation, perhaps in fruitful conjunction with the historicist and political questions that have earned their central position in our inquiries" (1).

is “mediated by an ideal of intimate nationality” (12)? Coviello’s use of “identification” is psychoanalytic in origin (11), but my method is more clearly attuned to the transformations psychoanalysis has undergone in recent years, and how these can be applied to a textual reading. In his more recent book, *Tomorrow’s Parties: Sex and the Untimely in Nineteenth-Century America*, Coviello asks what “erotic life” looked like in the nineteenth century (4) prior to the advent of sexology, beginning with Richard von Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis*, the assumptions of which were perhaps solidified in the aftermath of Oscar Wilde’s legal troubles in 1895: “How, and in what terms, were nineteenth-century subjects able to imagine the parameters of sexuality? [...]. What could be counted *as* sexuality? Was it a circumscribed set of bodily practices? A form of identification? A mode of relation?” (*Tomorrow’s Parties* 4). This dissertation will provide one (of surely many) particular answer in this regard: nineteenth-century American sexuality, more specifically, male sexuality, took shape, and was fragmented, through a series of tropes and imaginary strands, all of which can be grouped under the master-trope of hysteron proteron, or the preposterous. Before the beginning of “modern” sexuality, caught in the pressures and anxieties of mid-nineteenth-century America, “that long, vexed moment” (32), it is not surprising to find the traces and sometimes overt applications of a rhetorical device that disrupts progress, questions the qualification of deviancy, and mobilizes passionate, awkward modes of being that resist cogent signification.

Thoreau, Melville, and Hawthorne employ the preposterous in order to both impugn modern society and to champion a different vision of American identity. Similar to how the

swimmers of Eakins' painting appear at "distinct moments of their swim," the texts of Thoreau, Melville, and Hawthorne overlap figurally in ways that allow us to establish a sense of contiguity between them. While the authors do not enter into direct community, there is an intimate connection between their textual productions. Thematically, the structure of this dissertation resembles a hysteron proteron; it is a "backward birth." Beginning with Thoreau's confusions concerning birth and the rejuvenation of nature through anality, we may then imagine Melville's "chimney" acting as the "birthing" canal, mitigating Thoreau's "seed" through to Hawthorne, whose literature for/about children will form the greater part of my analysis in Chapter 3.

Thoreau's case is curious in that he makes rhetorical use of hysteron proteron in order to condemn the increasing materiality of nineteenth-century American progress. A good Foucauldian would refer to this as a counter-discourse—which we might instead call a counter-sodometry—as Thoreau's indictment of society largely works to counter the charges of "eccentricity" made against him by members of the nineteenth-century intelligentsia. His discourse, in other words, aims to naturalize his own perceived preposterousness. Thoreau's turn away from modernity—which is a return to the wilderness—engenders the potential for a sexual mobility that travels along paths that the normative trajectory of nineteenth-century masculinity could not glimpse. The preposterous in Thoreau, hence, makes room for an alternative American body politic, predicated on a "deliberately" intuitive way of moving through the world. My analysis depends on reading Thoreau's walking "abroad" as a form of what we today would call cruising. Walking for him becomes something *other* in a moment of forgetfulness, at a point when pragmatism gives way to intuition; for Thoreau, coincidentally, it is the intuitive life that is the most exhilarating and erotically charged. As I will be arguing, cruising depends upon the forgetting of everyday signs as well. It is thus the

Thoreauvian attunement to a sexualized form of intuition that creates for us a connection to a contemporary theory of cruising, which becomes a productively anachronistic term in my analysis. Crucially, Thoreau's intuition draws him towards nature's darker, traumatic side, to which he responds in a highly corporeal way; stretching, breaking, bleeding—these are the textures of nature that excite Thoreau the most. And the fragmentary metonymic connectivity between Thoreau's and nature's orifices will become a central focus of this chapter, insofar as this allows us to theorize and historicize an aesthetic of preposterousness in American literature. This provides us with an excellent first example of how the preposterous often works in conjunction, or makes use of, other tropes that nevertheless can function as the inverse of phallic representation, which is a primary aim of the preposterous.

The second chapter deals with Melville and architecture. I am here interested in tracing keywords related to masculine and feminine versions of domesticity as they appear in the ironic short story "I and My Chimney." "Backwardness" quickly emerges as the general sentiment of the male narrator; however, clusters of words related to the narrator's retrogressive attitude take on a positive valence in relation to the "rash" progressivism of the his wife. The massive chimney is the story's centerpiece, and the discourse of backwardness spirals around it. The aim of this chapter, then, is to show how the confusion of different spaces and directions (front/back; progression/reversal) works to enhance the profusion of ironic clusters in the narrative, which makes abundant use of the rhetorical figures hyperbole and litotes—both of which I read as subsidiary to the preposterous.

Hawthorne's use of the preposterous highlights the tension between repulsion and attraction within his authorship. For example, his villains are often portrayed in a way that dramatizes this tension, as their queer characteristics are presented in ways that both invoke a strong moralism and an identificatory strain that puts him in direct relation with vulnerable

characters—most often young girls. The antagonisms of his literature for children—which puts young boys and girls into uncouth circumstances that promote various confusions in relation to questions of time, space, gender, and the nonhuman—can, to some extent, be traced to his failed collaboration with Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and, more generally, to the lost ideal of same-sex intimacy, as I will show. Furthermore, in the final chapter, I will have occasion to demonstrate through a sustained discussion of unconscious signification in relation to childhood how the preposterous can inflect other rhetorical devices to do its underhanded work, so to speak. In turn, this discussion intersects with Hawthorne’s suspicious attitude towards the pedagogical imperative of the adolescent nation, which clashes with his own habit of homeschooling his children. As will become clear, the unconscious meanings of childhood responds to certain tropes of animality, and the question of the animal will be seen to influence Hawthorne’s use of the preposterous, as animality becomes another concept of contagion that prevents Hawthorne from fixing the ideal of childhood in his texts; at the same time, the animal influences the adult’s desire for children, and pedophilia is crossed (“bred”) with bestiality. Finally, alchemy emerges at the end of this chapter as a trope to “bind” the child, adult, and animal together in an illicit union that nevertheless prompts us to challenge the dominant assumptions of pedophilia and bestiality in relation to the umbrella term of sodomy.

Like Peter Coviello, I feel compelled to comment on the “uniform whiteness and maleness” (*Intimacy in America* 12) of the authors that inhabit these pages. Coviello is interested in telling “the story of how whiteness became what we might call an *enforced*

identification” during the antebellum years (11); at the same time, he outlines the ways in which—in the works of Poe, Melville, and Whitman—“the operative codes of masculine sexual propriety that were forming and reforming in the antebellum republic” (12) are rendered somewhat *inoperative* by the “peculiarities of idiom, figure, syntax, and diction” specific to each author (13). “Style” is important to my study as well, and while I cannot claim “archival” justification for my choice of authors (12), by affirming Coviello’s statement that close reading is “a way of doing history” (16), my strategy is unabashedly “rhetorical,” insofar as the “peculiarities of form” (18) that characterize the writings of Thoreau, Melville, and Hawthorne in different ways more than any other authors at midcentury (Poe might confidently join this awkward “coterie,” but he will have to wait for now) help us contextualize and formalize the preposterous currents of American literature. At this juncture, we should say a few words about history and periodization, as these have become contested terms in queer studies.

In their 2005 *PMLA* article, “Queering History,” Jonathan Goldberg and Madhavi Menon introduced the term “unhistoricism,” which was supposed to encompass a way of doing history that “would be invested in suspending determinate sexual and chronological differences while expanding the possibilities of the nonhetero, with all its connotations of sameness, similarity, proximity, and anachronism” (1609). In the same breath, they insist on using “Renaissance” rather than “early modern” to emphasize the point that what matters about the past is not “its relation to a predetermined modernity,” as “early modern” would indicate, but instead the “ongoing possibilities of resignification in recognition of the fact that the past is never fully over and never fully known” (1610). In the latest issue of *PMLA*, Valerie Traub takes Goldberg, Menon, and other “unhistoricists” to task in different ways. In regard to the controversy over periodization, she says the following: “To periodize is not to

advocate a particular method, and the identity that periodicity imposes need not be inevitably problematic—as long as it is understood to be contingent, manufactured, invested, and not produced by othering what came before” (32). Traub’s point is well taken, and this dissertation agrees that failing “to specify the terms of queer’s historicity is to ignore desire’s emergence from distinct cultural and material arrangements of space and time, as well as from what psychoanalysis calls libidinal predicates” (33). I will, however, carefully insist that, despite Traub’s claim to the contrary—“Readings [...] are not the same thing as history” (30)—reading texts closely of a certain period can do the work of history. As such, this dissertation moves away from the inflexible unhistoricism, while at the same time aligning itself with the recent return to aestheticism in American Studies.

Chapter 1: Cruising Thoreau, Cruising Nature

I. Introduction: Queering the Trajectory of Thoreau Criticism

*Greece who am I that should remember thee?
Thy Marathon and thy Thermopylae
Is my life vulgar my fate mean
Which on such golden memories can lean?*
—Henry David Thoreau, “Greece”

Henry David Thoreau often engages the preposterous figure of speech, hysteron proteron—putting the “cart before the horse,” which “is neither beautiful nor useful” (*Walden* 81)—in order to impugn society with going against the order of things, *according to him*. In this passage, Thoreau is speaking about the unnatural way in which we have let ourselves “become the tools of [our] tools” (80), and “putting the cart before the horse,” then, directly means that we, by our own carelessness, have allowed that which should work *for* us come to work *us*, rather. “We do not ride on the railroad,” as he puts it in “Where I Lived, and What I Lived for,” “it rides upon us” (136). As a point of substantiation, in “The Village” chapter of *Walden* he refers to the “desperate odd-fellow society” of his neighbors who “pursue and paw him with their dirty institutions” (218). He thus enlists the preposterous as a method or strategy, we can argue by way of Robert B. Ray, for reversing “the unnatural order he detects in his neighbors’ lives,” dominated as they are by “inessential luxuries” (91). In this way, *Walden* can be read as a precursor to Thomas Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow*, which

uses hysteron proteron to show that “Western knowledge [since Descartes] has preposterously sought to eliminate the simple novelties of a ‘lovable but scatterbrained Mother Nature’” (Weisenburger 89); Pynchon’s application of this trope, according to Steven Weisenburger, namely emphasizes how Western epistemology has placed “deterministic human rationality ahead of (an often indeterminate) earthly being” (89).

Thoreau’s use of hysteron proteron is mainly stylistic, but we could also see it as his attempt to counter the discourse of “eccentricity” that had come to claim him, as we will see. What is thought to be natural, or ordered, as opposed to dis-ordered, largely depends on the specific discourse. In fact, Thoreau’s fellow contemporary thinkers (most conspicuously Emerson) considered his sense of the world to be exceedingly odd, if not preposterous, or conflicting with the sense of reason. That Emerson should have found Thoreau confusing and frustrating is clear from the eulogy he prepared for Thoreau, following his death on May 6, 1862. While Emerson initially enlists the deceased Thoreau in his imagining of the true American type, who is patient, industrious, but also an iconoclast, his text quickly makes clear that Thoreau cannot easily be assimilated to Emerson’s normalizing project. Emerson’s text contains not a few paradoxes: for example, Thoreau’s “hidden life” is contrasted with the fact that he “had no secrets,” but still he had access to the “secret of friendship” (10:420, 424, 427-28). Further, what is it that makes Thoreau, “the man of men,” so unsettling (420)? Is it because of his “dangerous frankness”—“nothing seem[s] concealed from [his] terrible eyes” (420)—or is it rather because of the secret knowledge he possesses that one can only share in if one would be willing to entertain certain “risks” (428, 424)? Chief among Emerson’s concerns appears to be the fact that “the severity of his ideal interfered to deprive him of a healthy sufficiency of human society” (428). As such, Emerson’s eulogy would seem to

agree with George Eliot's sentiment that Thoreau belong[ed] "not the go-ahead species, but its opposite pole" (qtd. in Wood 733).

But what would characterize this "opposite pole"? Emerson traces Thoreau's obstinacy to his style of writing, which appears to have offended Emerson's romantic "symbolism." Thoreau, Emerson writes, has the "habit of a realist to find things the *reverse* of their appearance [which] incline[s] him to put every statement in a paradox. A certain habit of antagonism deface[s] his earlier writings, a trick of rhetoric not quite outgrown in his later, of substituting for the obvious word and thought its diametrical opposite" (10:428; my emphasis). Thoreau's opposition to nineteenth-century American society and norms cannot be traced to a specific lost ideal of yore; rather, his particular brand of idealism is tempered by a utopian impulse that takes seriously the ethical dimension of the unforeseeable and the unexpected. The reversal of the order of things—the disruption of the norm—is contingent on a yet-to-be-imagined ideal that needs to be teased out of concealment. And perhaps we can here agree with David Leverenz when he says that, in relation to Eliot's review of *Walden* quoted above, for Thoreau, being in opposition is merely the vehicle for a deeper sense of alienation, "not feeling like himself at all" (25). In this chapter, by paying attention to his major and "minor" writings alike (such as the *Journal*), we will see how Thoreau's affinity for that which is considered "lowly" and improper coheres with a queer ethics of de-subjectification. In turn, this will reveal to us the fecundity of the preposterous as it appears in Thoreau's work.

Thoreau tended to think about virtue in relation to the mystery of human sympathy—most assuredly, male sympathy. As the “promise of a man must have become experience and character before it can be expressed in his face,” he wrote in his journal on Sunday October 25, 1840,¹⁵ so the “aspirations of virtue is but a superficies and I know not if it be thick or thin—but the features are made up of successive layers of performance—and show the thickness of the character.” He is attracted by the features of other men for the promise they might conceal, and as with his interest in surveying, or “fathoming,” Walden Pond, Thoreau approaches this problematic according to a depth/surface dialectic. Michael Warner makes much of this comparison in his essay “Thoreau’s Bottom,” where he concludes that,

The notion of having contact with other men—of penetrating and fathoming them, of harboring in their barred coves and sounding their depths, of driving piles in their foundations and finding a *point d’appui* within them—has been imagined by means of a fantasy investment in the anus as an organ of privacy. (76-7)

I will engage with Warner’s analysis later in the chapter, but for now it will suffice to say that Thoreau’s interest in depths and bottoms extends much farther than Walden Pond; as a result, we should not be surprised to learn that “virtue is not all van [front], but needs to be viewed both before and behind” (October 25, 1840).

On June 22, 1839, Thoreau jotted down the following in his journal: “That virtue we appreciate is as much ours as another’s.” Thoreau penned this comment about virtue in his journal immediately following his description of Edmund Sewall—that “pure uncompromising spirit”—the younger brother of his brief love interest, Ellen Sewall, and, as a theme, virtue is evoked in the poem Thoreau wrote about him as well. Edmund is

¹⁵ For Thoreau’s *Journal* I have consulted both the Princeton edition, edited by Elizabeth Hall Witherell et al., and the version published by Dover, edited by Bradford Torrey and Francis H. Allen. Rather than page numbers, I have opted to simply use the date of entry.

“unconscious” of his own virtue, Thoreau says in the *Journal*, and it even exists “independent of [him];” this “invisible presence,” however, specifies “a sympathy more rare” than any mortal may know, as Thoreau puts it in the last line of the last stanza of “Lately, Alas, I Knew a Gentle Boy” (l. 52). Thoreau is left to celebrate not just the sweet “tragedy” of their separation, but this further impels him to seek traces of their sympathetic bond in nature: “If I but love that virtue which he is, / Though it be scented in the morning air, / Still shall we be truest acquaintances” (ll. 49-51). “A stern respect” keeps them apart as yet they “nearer dr[a]w to each” (l. 26, 25). The union between a grown man and a young boy would be “sternly” codified in both juridical and everyday law, although neither is alluded to in Thoreau’s verse, and it is not surprising that Thoreau is forced to “tread [his] single way alone” (l. 34). What should we conclude based on his feeble attempt to convince us that his sympathy with Edmund is preserved in something as ephemeral as “morning air”? Does this call to nature’s transcendence not strike us as sad, rather than joyful, in this instance? With “bliss irrevocably gone” (l. 36), the abstraction, or “spiritualization,” so familiar to courtly love poetry (see Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment* 89), appears a necessarily desperate form of sublimation. If perhaps the emotion that their meeting inspired in Thoreau was as intense and rare as the poem indicates—“Eternity may not the chance [of their encounter] repeat” (l. 33)—turning to nature, his most prized refuge, could be his only recourse.

Considered an “odd stick” by one, anonymous detractor (see Cooke in *Thoreau as Seen by His Contemporaries* 81), Thoreau must have endured at least a degree of mockery in life—and that he was careful to keep his distance to Edmund appears a wise choice considering the unwanted attention he was getting from, presumably, other inhabitants of Concord. A year to the day after he had written of Edmund’s virtue in his journal, he pondered the following: “What mean these sly suspicious looks, as if you were an odd fish—a

piece of crockery ware to be tenderly handled?” (June 22, 1840). In the same entry, he goes on to wonder, in a lamenting sort of way, how it is that “a man [cannot] be as calmly tolerant as a potato field in the sun—whose equanimity is not disturbed by Scotch thistles over the wall, but [in response merely] smiles and waxes till the harvest let thistles mount never so high.” In view of this, we can thus not agree completely with Emerson’s estimation that, “No opposition or ridicule had any weight with [Thoreau]” (10:417).

Human society still has a lot to learn from nature, which is why we can only hope to know a stranger, intimately, “in a foreign land,” as Thoreau’s poem “I Knew a Man by Sight” reads (l. 16):

Late in a wilderness
I shared his mess,
For he had hardships seen,
And I a wanderer been;
He was my bosom friend, and I was his. (ll. 21-5)

Wanderer to wanderer, roaming (rather, cruising) the wilderness, we can only dream to share each other’s “mess”¹⁶ in the dim light of night, hidden by the screen of un-biased nature. The “sharing” that Thoreau speaks of here is similar to the “process of attuning” that Branka Arsić detects in her investigation of “mood” in Emerson (*On Leaving* 137). Impersonally, this affective attunement is enacted, not “‘by means of words’,” but rather “‘by the gestures of others, the tone of their voice, which independently of their own will—almost secretly—attunes us to their mood” (137). While, for Thoreau, the process of becoming someone’s “bosom friend” might include having a “social chat” (“I Knew...” l. 18), word-less gestures, such as “staring” (l. 10) and “bowing” (l. 13), or holding hands (l. 17), are no less important

¹⁶ Yes, “mess” alludes most obviously to a meal, but in the previous stanza Thoreau has established a physical rapport with his “blameless wight” (l. 2; as an adjective, “wight” can mean “strong and courageous,” “a warrior” [*OED*]) as he “grasp[s] his hand” (l. 17)—or is it “his cane” (l. 7)?—and might we not speculate that we are dealing here with a metaphor for something “mess-ier”?

in this erotic attunement: “Beyond or underneath the meaning willfully conveyed by words there is a flow of ‘subterranean’ meanings into which another unwillingly puts us. We are floated into a mood without realizing it by another who has brought us there without knowing it” (Arsić, *On Leaving* 137). Michael Snediker affirms the wordlessness of cruising, as he points to the “specular” component of erotic interest (63): “Cruising ceases to be cruising when smiles and their gestural extensions cede to words” (64). As we shall see, Thoreau moves beyond human gestures, and the “subterranean” mood of his particular erotic disposition may very well turn out to have a nonhuman source; it could even consist of an amalgamation of nonhuman forces and figures.

“I Knew a Man by Sight” is similar in affect to certain of Whitman’s “Calamus” poems in *Leaves of Grass*. “In Paths Untrodden,” the speaker, having “[e]scaped from the life that exhibits itself” (l. 3), is now

No longer abashed — for in this secluded spot I can
 respond as I would not dare elsewhere,
 Strong upon me the life that does not exhibit itself,
 yet contains all the rest,
 Resolved to sing no songs to-day but those of manly
 attachment. (“Calamus 1,” ll. 13-18)

Commenting on recent Whitman criticism, specifically that of Jerome Loving and David Reynolds, Michael Warner points out that “the [‘Calamus’] poems very often depict the kind of fluid public affection that we see in so many photographs of late nineteenth-century male friends, rather than the secretive and stigmatized eroticism of a deviant sexual minority” (“Pleasures and Dangers of Shame” 283). This appears to be the main point: “Not everything that looks queer to us now, we are reminded, would have looked that way in Whitman’s time” (283). Warner does not pay much heed to the ambiguities of Loving and Reynolds, however, and he “suspect[s]” that, for most readers, “the language of shame that is so salient

in ‘Calamus’ will be taken *prima facie* as a sign that something queer is going on” (284). That Thoreau should have subscribed to the fantasy of developing “a chastely homoerotic chumship” in nature, as per Leslie Fiedler’s now famous claim (see Leverenz 34), seems apparent, but this “myth” never quite finds an equilibrium in Thoreau—and, as in the case of Whitman, “seclusion” seems to be a prerequisite for manly attachments to happen. Considering both this poem and that of the “Gentle Boy,” regardless of what Thoreau’s most recent biographer Robert D. Richardson tells us (see 58), the “intensity of the life excited” appears to be charged, then, with a profound longing, specifically, for intimacy with other, often much younger, males; but we can infer from the entry in Thoreau’s journal preceding the one on Edmund that such intimacy could not move beyond description, whether in journal or verse form, for fear of prompting “[t]he words of some men,” “adher[ing] like burs,” to be “thrown forcibly against” him (June 4, 1839). And until the utopian calm of the potato field has been adopted by society, we might expect to encounter again and again that “queer dissenter,” an archetype that Thoreau would appear to resemble, of whom it is not only expected “that he *not* complain: nothing would be enough except his active participation in what everybody is already affirming” (Terada 32). As any reader of Thoreau will know, he was neither interested in affirming nor participating in the increasingly materialistic society of nineteenth-century New England—at least not in a way that anybody would expect.

Affirming the norm would also mean affirming a certain kind of sexuality and designation of gender. Judging from his journal entries, Thoreau would have experienced a not insignificant level of anxiety concerning his manhood and how it was conceived of by his contemporaries. We might here wager that, as an outward defense mechanism, it was due to such negative feelings that he adopted a relatively austere demeanor, discounting the luxuries of life, as it were. Indeed, as Robert B. Ray shows, Thoreau’s “public attitudes, recorded in

Walden, often contradict the private ones, confided to his journals [and poems], even when written concurrently” (88); as Ray further reports, “put[ting] the best face on the matter” (88), masking what he understood to be too odd about himself, was deemed a necessary strategy by an author who up until the publication of *Walden* had not met with any financial or critical success.

His strategy was only partly successful, however, and his public self, hard and cold as he sometimes appeared,¹⁷ led detractors to apply certain designations to him. While not directly antagonized as such, Thoreau was sometimes met by his contemporaries with what we today might call a careful or guarded homophobia. Henry Abelove reports on how “eccentricity,” as a “coded description” (29), was regularly used by reviewers to both praise and criticize *Walden* when it first appeared in the beginning of August 1854. In effect, we here encounter a specifically socially useful kind of “ignorance,” which allows the speaker to make reference to that which is not allowed to exist in any overt kind of way; in a sinister way, this produces a form of what D. A. Miller calls an “antigay doxology” (*Bringing Out Roland Barthes* 16). As an example of how this is produced, Miller writes about the “homophobic reception” of Roland Barthes’ work (17) that, “the knowledge that plays dumb is exactly what permits the abuses of an ignorance that in fact knows full well what it is doing” (16-7). *The love that cannot speak its name* is actually, as Eve Sedgwick points out, made subject to a very elaborate and particular “cognitive positioning” (*Epistemology of the Closet* 73-4), even if this merely consists of “a series of silences!” (*Tendencies* 11). From this it follows that each such silence only “accrues particularity by fits and starts, in relation to the discourse that surrounds and differentially constitutes it” (*Epistemology* 3). In short, this has the effect “of naming something ‘unspeakable’ as a way of denoting (without describing)

¹⁷ Whitman, otherwise an admirer of Thoreau, reports on his apparent “superciliousness” and general “disdain for [common] men,” the latter of which being his “great fault” (*Thoreau as Seen by His Contemporaries* 116).

male same-sex activity” (*Tendencies* 75). It is not necessarily the critic’s job to force an awareness of different desires and identifications—to “out” a particular writer; rather, perhaps the more intellectually rewarding and compelling approach would be to examine the ways in which someone like Thoreau chose to respond to his somewhat marginalized status. By doing so, would we then be able to unravel “the utopian strand within the distinctly male erotics of his writing” (Warner, “*Walden*’s Erotic Economy” 157)? What amounts to “a transformed libido”—a properly “virtuous” sharing of the self (158)? I will be arguing instead that walking in secluded areas, while it might initially respond to feelings of shame, becomes important for Thoreau as this prompts an intuition of the “nonconceptual” aspect of thought, and that, as Branka Arsić has pointed out, walking means becoming absent-minded and forgetful of societal expectations (“Walking Dead: Thoreau on Thinking,” no page number);¹⁸ ironically, it is by entering a state of self-lessness that the full import of the verb “to be” is realized, and we can then know “where we are and the infinite extent of our relations” (*Walden* 217). In this chapter, we will thus explore the extent to which walking connotes a preposterous activity, as it is by walking at night—the posterior of day—that we can come to “appreciate the vastness and strangeness of Nature,” but only as a result of having been “turned round,” facing any which way except forward (*Walden* 217).

In *American Sympathy*, Caleb Crain claims that while, in nineteenth-century America, men who “loved other men found it harder and harder to express their feelings to each other” due to the rise of homophobia and the alienating effects of industrialization, poetic language offered an outlet for those “who felt tabooed homosexual sentiments in private,” “because of

¹⁸ Branka Arsić presented this un-published paper at Western University on 22 March 2013.

its license to express links between men” (152).¹⁹ The mode of literary expression itself thus became the object of homoerotic desire—or at least the vehicle through which such desire could be expressed. But Thoreau was not eager to express any such “link” to another man in any direct way—the vagueness of poetry and the privacy of his journal had to suffice as an outlet.

In either case, the moniker of eccentricity, sticking “bur-like” to Thoreau, was used to denote an otherwise ill-defined, general oddness attaching to him. The negative reviews that Abelow quotes further connect, by way of displacement or even substitution, Thoreau’s ostensible eccentricity with selfishness (30), as he “disappoint[ed] the natural expectations of his family and friends” (Emerson 10:414). Drawing on the binary activity/passivity, Emerson’s eulogy for Thoreau further censoriously laments that “he had no ambition. Wanting this, instead of engineering for all America, he was the captain of a huckleberry party” (429). Thoreau’s supposed selfishness concerns the absence of family and marriage as themes in *Walden*, and some commentators therefore deemed the work dangerous and even a threat to the very furthering of American civilization, if not the race.²⁰ The “dangerous” element thus invoked of course concerns the issue of sodomy. Without naming it, one of the foremost moralists and temperance advocates of the nineteenth century, T. S. Arthur, in his *Advice to Young Men on their Duties and Conduct in Life* from 1848, nonetheless references one of the more dire implications of sodomy: “One of the first laws of our being is the law of

¹⁹ If such “license” had been accepted around the middle of the century, this was not unequivocally the case around the *fin de siècle*, as Henry Ward Beecher’s *Lectures to Young Men*, first published in 1846, makes clear. Poetic language is here referred to as exuding “luxuriance,” and with moralizing flair Beecher declares the effect of American literature upon the nation “has been to create a lively relish for exquisitely artful licentiousness, and disgust only for vulgarity” (184).

²⁰ In this way, as Bryce Traister has shown, the image of the eccentric Thoreau is strikingly similar to that of the bachelor in American culture earlier in the century. Traister writes: “the bachelor’s idle and sexually suspect un-reproductivity served as a focal point in much of the writing about bachelors in this period. Negative accounts of the bachelor implied a range of disagreeable traits, from excessive vanity, to suspicious misogyny, to the celibate’s destruction of America itself” (“The Wandering Bachelor: Irving, Masculinity, and Authorship” 112). On this point, Peter Coviello quotes from Thoreau’s journal to suggest that marriage, for Thoreau, “is linked [...] to the ‘machinery of society’,” (33-34), for which Thoreau has only contempt.

association, and whoever disregards it, disregards not only his own, but the common good” (30)—inverting the natural order of reproduction. He who becomes a “hermit[] in the very midst of society” will find himself, Arthur warns, “like a hand that lies inactive appropriating the life-blood that flows into it, without doing any thing for the whole body” (30). This “inactivity”—which it does not take a very imaginative mind to understand might, never mind the claim to passivity, include the active “wasting” of one’s seed by masturbation²¹—if actively pursued, will lead to “mental impotency” (30). Refusing the responsibilities and trials of marriage, in the Christian tradition that Arthur draws on, in this way, is grouped with the evils of Sodom and Gomorrah.²² In fact, as David Greven has pointed out, autoeroticism in the antebellum period “was a very troubling concept to many people,” and it was, “if anything, a more publicly denounced form of sexual expressiveness than homoeroticism” (*The Fragility of Manhood* 10).

Perhaps as an attempt to erase some of Thoreau’s more eccentric (i.e., queer) qualities, by claiming that his failure to form a permanent attachment to Ellen Sewall haunted him the rest of his days, Richardson discovers a convenient explanation for why Thoreau only “took an emotional interest in other women who were mostly older or safely married or both” (62); however, Walter Harding has made the obvious point that, whether “[c]onsciously or subconsciously[,] Thoreau knew all those women were safely unavailable”

²¹ In his assessment of how sodomy was portrayed in colonial New England, Michael Warner points out that “onanism,” according to the sermons of Samuel Danforth, “leads to all the other forms of ‘sodomitical uncleanness’” (“New England Sodom” 334). Onanism, “as a sin ‘housed in the genitals,’” can then be related to *luxuria*, which, as an umbrella term for “sexual sins,” was seen to “le[a]d to effeminacy and animality, ‘softness’ and bestiality,” as Allen J. Frantzen points out in *Before the Closet* (186). It is worth remembering as well that sodomy, as Richard Halpern points out, was traditionally defined as the “misuse of semen for anything—including male masturbation—that does not serve to fulfill its reproductive potential” (*Shakespeare’s Perfume* 20).

²² In one of his sermons, Martin Luther offers the following lists of deviants who do not savor the opportunity to share in the “manifold [...] unpleasantnesses” that marriage “cultivates:” “All this [the responsibilities and trials of marriage] the chaste whore-mongers, saintly effeminates and Sodomites nicely escape, serving God outside of God’s ordinance by doings of their own” (2:56).

(“Thoreau and Eros” 152).²³ Warner even calls this kind of speculation “fanciful” (“*Walden’s* Erotic Economy” 159). In fact, as we learn from his journal, Thoreau never admired a woman more than when she showed “a masculine appreciation of poetry & philosophy,” thereby reminding him “less often of her sex” (November 13, 1851). Several of Thoreau’s biographers agree that his short-lived affair with Ellen Sewall was not quite as romantic as Richardson otherwise indicates, and there does not appear to be sufficient evidence to suggest that this occurrence in his life should necessarily prove why “he never let himself fall in love with an eligible woman” again (Richardson 62). In fact, as Harding suggests, it seems probable that “the whole affair was an attempt on [Thoreau’s] part to conform to the rituals of his society” (“Thoreau and Eros” 154). We should here note that in this text from 1978 Harding contradicts his own previous analysis of Thoreau’s relationship with Edmund, in which he had stated that, “Thoreau’s admiration for Edmund was intellectual rather than physical” (*The Days of Henry Thoreau* 79).²⁴ On the whole, Richardson appears mostly interested in downplaying Thoreau’s queerer side, and, not surprisingly, he seeks to render what he calls the “squeamishness” of modern readers regarding Thoreau’s interest in Sewall’s younger brother, Edmund, unfounded, as, drawing on Harding’s early findings, “it never crossed [the Thoreaus or the Sewalls’] minds that there might have been a physical attraction or longing behind all this” (58). Richardson seems very confident on this point, but in his eagerness to appease his “squeamish” modern readers he does not present us with much evidence to substantiate his speculations.

²³ In his rigid (pseudo-)Freudian reading, Raymond D. Gozzi skirts the question of Thoreau’s homoeroticism by claiming that the reason he never became seriously interested in any eligible women can be explained by the fact that he never matured beyond the Oedipal stage, thus remaining fixated on his mother (8).

²⁴ In an article from 1974, four years prior to Harding’s re-consideration of Thoreau’s homoeroticism, Michael West directs his reader to the same page of *Days*, in order to reject the idea that Thoreau should have any “latent” homosexual desires (1051).

Keeping with the Edmund episode, Richardson further states that, in a somewhat underhanded fashion, all “possible [Freudian] implications” of Thoreau’s excitement over Edmund ought not to carry much weight in our interpretation of Thoreau’s motives (58), whereas Harding with Michael Meyer some years previous to Richardson’s biography exactly made note of the “psychological implications” regarding Thoreau’s interest in the young boy, as expressed in the poem about the “Gentle Boy” (5); these “implications,” not surprisingly, point to the question of homosexuality and pedophilia. In the main, however, critics have tended to disregard the queer impetus of Thoreau’s “oddly sentimental verses” to Edmund, and Michael West concludes that, “far from harboring a suppressed but powerful attraction toward men, Thoreau simply displays an inhibited capacity for affection” (1052). But, adopting the central question underpinning Miller’s task of “bringing out” Roland Barthes, what would it mean “to agree to evincing the traces of a gay genealogy in a [body of work] whose even partial success in the culture’s terms would almost guarantee [...] the faintness of those traces?” (17). Before we answer this as it relates to Thoreau’s case, however—and let us state at the outset that the nature of such traces are necessarily faint—we should ask if it even make sense to speak of a “gay genealogy” in relation to a writer who would rather perish than express any real interest in “genital sexuality” (West 1052)? I think it does, but only if we approach the subject from a slightly different angle from what Miller has in mind.

As we learned from Abelow above, Thoreau’s main “inhibition”—what we with reference to Heather Love could term his unnatural “lack of a natural desire” (175, note 22)—came to mark him as eccentric, but this inhibition might simply be the expression of his unwillingness to conform to traditional patterns of (heterosexual) affection. On this point, we should remember that Thoreau considered the society of his day and the desires it produced

to be largely “unnatural,” as modern luxuries had perverted the “necessaries of life”—transgressing again the “*animal life*” inherent to the human constitution by supplementing it with excessive food, shelter, and clothing (*Walden* 56-5). However, as he shunned overt displays of sensuality, his eccentricity can best be understood as queer to the extent that it marks “an absence of or aversion to sex,” in Love’s phrasing (40). If, in life, he directed his affection away from human society, becoming oriented around somewhat unconventional sites and objects of excitation in nature, this may just as well be because he was uncomfortable with physical (human) intimacy of any kind, and not necessarily as part of what he felt was an essential closeting of his homosexuality—even if we suspect that the latter might not exclude the former; if he were somewhat hesitant or sometimes aggressively reluctant to engage in emotional, not to say sensual, relationships with his peers, as we shall see, he entered a much more open mood when interacting with and writing about nature. In this way, it will become clear that Thoreau is in fact anticipating a sexual model based on a “certain kind of ascetic disposition” (Bersani, “Sociability and Cruising” 48), “one in which a deliberate [that Thoreauvian word] avoidance of relationships might be crucial in initiating, or at least clearing the ground for, a new relationality” (59). That relationality, I will suggest, is based upon an intricate rhetorical and thematic preposterousness. Thus, while, as I have shown, Thoreau certainly yearned for a kind of intimacy that, in modern parlance, can be called queer, due to societal and cultural strictures his queerness was rerouted in his writings, surfacing in inverted and “regressive” figures of nature and self.

Teresa de Lauretis has pointed out that, “the relation between the queerness of an authorial persona and the queerness of her or his writing [can] by no means [...] be taken for granted” (243). Locating Thoreau’s queerness solely in biographical facts, therefore, is problematic to the extent that this can come to support, contrary to our best intentions, an

impetus to “straighten out” the strangeness that his texts contain. The absence of literal references to sex in his writings does not make them any less queer—and I understand “queer” in this context to connote linguistic or stylistic excess, as much as the tending of a general oddness towards “natural desire.” While his writings can only (mostly) be considered erotic by making certain inferences, on the “confines” and in the “intermittences” of his descriptions of nature we find not merely moments of great tenderness (for human and nonhuman figures), but through a careful consideration of the particular ethics that defines his woodland sauntering, a new way of reading Thoreau emerges—one that both considers contemporary concerns over the expression of non-normative sexuality and the question of stylistic excess, which, we should note, are no less important to queer studies.

Acknowledging that “a queer text carries the inscription of sexuality as something more than sex” (de Lauretis 244) is therefore crucial to my reading of Thoreau. In other words, somewhat against his own intention, Thoreau’s texts “luxuriate” freely, and “luxury” is here understood in terms not of superfluity or waste, primarily, “but of the order or fitness of things” (McClung 123), as this is related to a preposterous rhetoric. To sum up, rather than aiming to uncover (exclusively) a “gay genealogy” in his work, as queer, according to etymology, “is, after all, a spatial term, which then gets translated into a sexual term, a term for a twisted sexuality that does not follow a ‘straight line’” (Ahmed 67), I am interested in those instances when his natural descriptions and metaphors about life are bent out of shape to such a degree that it becomes difficult to locate a clear or straight-forward concurrency between his self-proclaimed ethos of purity and the queer assemblages of weird etymologies that make up his textual productions, as if his writings themselves were “queer-mouthed,” following Hawthorne’s description of Thoreau (*The American Notebooks* 8:353).²⁵ The form

²⁵ All references to Hawthorne’s work are to the *Centenary Edition*.

and style of his writings—to the extent that they disrupt the traditional, “implicit model of the sequence or, as in grammar, the line” (Parker, “Preposterous Events” 190)—auspiciously indicate Thoreau’s preposterousness.

II. Woodland Sauntering and Textual Cruising

To contemplate ecology’s unfathomable intimacies is to imagine pleasures that are not heteronormative, not genital, not geared to ideologies about where the body stops and starts.

—Timothy Morton, “Queer Ecology”

In [Thoreau’s] sailings and walks he bears witness to things and persons no one ever knew of, or which everybody forgot about; he enjoys the sight of them; he is perceptive enough to understand their importance for the world they inhabit; they instruct him with a meaning or a truth; he writes about them, aware that his responsibility is to record what he saw and thus to recollect people and things, saving them from decay.

—Branka Arsić, *On Leaving*

In the introduction to the anthology *Queer Ecologies*, Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson make the claim that “modern nature-spaces have been deeply influenced by institutions and practices that have assumed and imposed particular sexual relations on the landscape” (12); specifically, from the mid-nineteenth century, public parks became the loci for the performance and solidification of “white European masculinity” (13). (It is of course ironic that Central Park in New York and others like it have become major cruising grounds for gay men since then.) Additionally, drawing on Eve Sedgwick’s reading of the binary public/private, the public destination of the park, while perhaps not in the Victorian era, would come to name a “space where cross-sex couples *may*, whenever they feel like it, display affection freely, while same-sex couples [would have to] always conceal it”

(*Tendencies* 10). Against this tendency to cultivate nature according to a heteronormative agenda, Thoreau's essay "Walking" emerges as a central document. Of course, he does not name walking a homosexual activity, but his tendency to disavow normative, or "common," uses of nature shares certain affinities with the "counterpublic" pursuit of cruising. (I will engage with Judith Halberstam's term later in more detail). In this text, he namely poses the following rhetorical question "what would become of us if we walked only in a garden or a mall?" (*Excursions* 190); further, he dreads the day when nature will be turned into frivolous "pleasure grounds" to the detriment of "true enjoyment" in nature (195). Enjoyment is a multivalent term in Thoreau, but it means first and foremost the divestiture of subjectivity—the self lost to society and the Symbolic Order. The cruising that goes on today in Central Park and others like it surely turns the ground into a site of pleasure, but in an unruly sort of way. At this point, I should stress that it is not a matter of trying to prove that Thoreau would approve of the type of concealed, anonymous sexual activity that happens in parks today—although I would like to think that someone who described himself as "yearn[ing] towards all wildness" (Bennett 5) could be able to appreciate the bonds of intimacy that are formed outside the bounds of polite society, and an enjoyment that does not adhere to the prescriptions of a system that attempts to domesticate nature by turning it into a concern for urban planners, making of it a "part of the integrated logics of capitalist production" (Stewart, *Reading and Disorder* 63). Indeed, in a poem already cited, Thoreau describes a scene that seems very "cruisy:" he encounters a "blameless wight" "[w]here I had chanced to roam / And Volumes stared at him, and he at me" ("I Knew a Man by Sight" l. 9-10).

First presented as a lecture in 1851, "Walking" appeared in print for the first time shortly after Thoreau's death in 1862. In this section, I will argue that his ethos of walking—or, rather, "sauntering"—that Thoreau outlines in this text is actually akin to a form of

“cruising” *in* and *of* nature; or, it is rather to say that cruising and sauntering share a sense of the unhistorical. As Nietzsche puts it in “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” “it is always the same thing that makes happiness happiness: the ability to forget or, expressed in scholarly fashion, the capacity to feel *unhistorically* during its duration” (*Untimely Meditations* 62). As I here appropriate Nietzsche’s formulation, cruising and sauntering both advocate forgetfulness, the forgetting of social norms and lessons imputed to the self based on a past or historical sense that has been sanctioned in a specific way. Cruising is becoming immersed in what Nietzsche would call the untimeliness of the present; “being *untimely*,” therefore, as Elizabeth Grosz points out, means “placing ourselves outside the constraints, the limitations and blinkers of the present” (*The Nick of Time* 117).²⁶ Nietzschean futurity must be sought in the cracks of the present, and untimeliness creates an awkward relation to history as teleology. The theory of cruising that I will be elaborating in this chapter participates in, or recalibrates, Nietzsche’s imperative of cultivating “the untimely, the out-of-place and the out-of-step” (Grosz, *Nick* 117), in order to present cruising as a hysteron proteron in itself that disrupts the “linear bias” of Western thought, which “is linked to the production of social order and precedence” (Parker, “Preposterous Events” 189). In a sense, as Leo Bersani suggests in his reformulation of Georg Simmel’s theory of sociability, cruising means becoming “*less than what we really are*” by “renounc[ing] possession” and the “acquisitive impulses” that otherwise dominate our modern reality (“Sociability and Cruising” 47). This sentiment appears lifted straight out of the “Economy” chapter of *Walden*; furthermore, Bersani’s emphasis on dressing “economically” when cruising—“the common bathhouse uniform—a towel—communicates very little [...] about

²⁶ Peter Coviello also invokes the “untimely” with reference to Nietzsche and Grosz in *Tomorrow’s Parties*, which, only published in April 2013, I encountered a full year after first drafting the present chapter. That we both, independently, should see fit to draw on this particular understanding of temporality in relation to nineteenth-century America indicates to me the appropriateness of its application in the first place.

our social personality (economic privilege, class status, taste)” (60)—appears amenable to Thoreau’s philosophy of moderate attire: “It is an interesting question how far men would retain their relative rank if they were divested of their clothes” (*Walden* 65).

Cruising, then, for Bersani, is a form of sexual sociability that “testifies to the seductiveness of the ceaseless movement toward and away from things without which there would be no particular desires for *any* thing” (“Sociability and Cruising” 48). Movement, change, back and forth—all are designations that apply to Thoreau’s material sense of ethics. Moreover, it is interesting to note how Thoreau evokes nautical metaphors to stand in for “sauntering” in describing his attitude towards clothing:

Perhaps we should never procure a new suit, however ragged or dirty the old, until we have conducted, so enterprised or *sailed* in some way [...] that to retain it would be like keeping new wine in old bottles [...]. Thus also the snake casts its slough [...] by an internal industry and expansion; for clothes are but our outmost cuticle and mortal coil. Otherwise we shall be found *sailing under false colors*. (*Walden* 66; my emphasis)

As we will remember from the introduction, the incessant turning away from the norm, facing toward illicit or otherwise disavowed pleasures, is exactly how we become seduced by the preposterous; in other word, for Thoreau, the “falseness” of one’s disposition, as presented by the norm (see Goldberg, *Sodometries* 122), might change depending on how others interpret the “colors” one chooses to “sail under.” The movement, or rhythm, of the preposterous can in this way be related to what Bersani, drawing on the language of psychoanalysis, calls “the ontological ground of the desirability of all things” (48). Peter Coviello suggests in *Tomorrow’s Parties* that Thoreau inhabits a “unique temporality,” as he is at once “out of step with modernity’s sped-up market time and exquisitely responsive to

the call of an intuited but inarticulate future” (33). I find agreeable this claim, but I would amend, or adjust, Coviello’s text on this point to say that Thoreau’s temporally fragmented self is unique to the extent that it does not so much “intuit” a future as it calls into question the importance of imagining a future in the first place based on forward movement; this is done through the creation of an elaborate figural system of reversals and inversions.

Equally important to my analysis, sauntering, in turn, becomes a metaphor for *my own* cruising of Thoreau. Thoreau should therefore be considered as not only a vital figure in the history of the conservation movement, but significant to the establishing of a genealogy of queer ecological thought as well; indeed, as Martimier-Sandilands and Erickson suggest, sex and nature can hardly be separated (5). They then proceed to point out that the relationship between sex and nature actually “exists institutionally, discursively, scientifically, spatially, politically, poetically, and ethically” (5). Dianne Chisholm makes of cruising a distinctly urban phenomenon,²⁷ but why should it necessarily be confined to city-spaces? As queer ecology draws heavily on the “bucolic ‘naturalness’ of pastoral homoeroticism” (Martimier-Sandilands and Erickson 4) we would do well to delineate briefly Thoreau’s place in relation to this tradition in homosexual thought.

“The homosexual imagination finds a special value and a particular use for [the Arcadian ideal], employing it” in one of three possible ways, Byrne R. S. Fone states, “to imply the presence of gay love and sensibility in a text that otherwise makes no explicit

²⁷ As she traces the emergence of cruising to the “gay scene” of “bustling nineteenth-century European and American capitals” in her book *Queer Constellations*, she notes how “the modern, capitalist city provides exquisite ‘cruising grounds’: boulevards and arcades, cafés, brasseries, and public baths for loitering, congregating, and communing with the crowd” (12).

statement about homosexuality” (Fone, “This Other Eden” 13). Certainly, no writer seeking popularity for his ideas in the nineteenth century would be foolish enough to submit his homoerotic desire to “plain speech” (although Whitman comes pretty close). However, especially in his journal entries, as Fone indicates (*A Road to Stonewall* 47), we find evidence to suggest that Thoreau dreamt of an erotic Arcadia, what he referred to as a “serene friendship-land” (June 14, 1838). His pastoral vision is thus imbued with a utopic desire for the formation of a queer community to be shared with an ideal friend—perhaps as an American Daphnis to his Ganymede (see Fone, “Eden” 14)—but he felt he could only securely even allude to this in his private journals, as Fone notes (*Road* 48). Indeed, in an entry from 1851, after having, in jubilant terms, described the opening of a lane next to a house as appearing “to lead no where though it [is] so wide & all ingulfing” (September 4, 1851), but, nevertheless, seeming to “suggest walking & adventuring [...] the going to some place strange & far away,” he intones that, shifting to a more reserved mood, Arcadia is “far away because we are far from living natural lives;” the same sentiment is repeated in an entry dated Saturday June 12,²⁸ 1852: “As yet we have not man in nature.” Commenting on this in *A Queer History of the United States*, Michael Bronski declares, frankly, that, “Thoreau’s message is that civilization, with its ‘severest penalties,’ [invoking the same *Journal* passage just quoted] is most unnatural” (51). We see here again how Thoreau invokes the preposterous trope in order to condemn “unnatural” society, as, to him, the social contract has inverted our proper, free relations to nature and each other.

²⁸ The Princeton edition, edited by Patrick F. O’Connell, erroneously lists the date as June 11, which was a Friday, not a Saturday.

In an untitled poem appearing on pages 383-84 of *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*,²⁹ Thoreau compares himself to “a parcel of vain strivings” // Dangling this way and that” (l. 1, 3):

A nosegay which Time clutched from out
Those fair Elysian fields,
With weeds and broken stems, in haste,
Doth make the rabble rout
That waste
The day he yields.

The form of each stanza emulates the “haste” with which this happenstance bouquet was put together—the lines stick out in the same incongruous way that we might imagine the “bunch of violets without their roots” (l. 7) having been “tied / By a chance bond together” (ll. 1-2) with “sorrel” (l. 10). The inclusion of the sorrel—having a distinctly sour taste—indicates a distribution of both appealing and unattractive qualities, but this somewhat unseemly “intertwining” of different plants appears to be the doings of an unskilled florist (i.e., society), rather than something inherent to each individual plant: “[A] wisp of straw” (l. 9) constitutes the “law” / By which [he’s] fixed” (ll. 10-1). In these lamenting lines, Thoreau suggests that the gangly and awkward figure he cuts in society—“loose and wide” as his limbs might be (4)—would form a most natural, perhaps even beautiful, assemblage in the mythic environment from which, at birth, he imagines he was uprooted. However, we glimpse the promise of renewal or return (a basic trope of the pastoral) in the two last stanzas, where he dreams that he might once more become “Alive” (the single word of line 35) if he were to be “brought” “by a kind hand” // To a strange land” (l. 34, 36); here he would surely not be considered “ugly as sin” (Hawthorne 8:353). His “seed” (his writings) would give way to a new bloom, in other words, or at least it could come to act as a source of

²⁹ All references to *A Week* will be to the Princeton edition, edited by Carl F. Hovde.

inspiration for future generations to live fuller, more “intense” lives—with all that that might contain.

This “land is lost sight of” (*Week* 383), however, and it is by being “wheedled and cheated into good behavior” that we have let ourselves lose touch with the “natural life,” which, opposed to the laws of society, on the other hand, would include the possibility of enjoying “unphobically,” in Sedgwick’s turn of phrase (see *Epistemology of the Closet* 136), the naked male body. While Thoreau deplores the “singular fact”—imagining the amazement it would provoke in a hypothetical, “visitant angel”—“that men [are] forbidden to expose their bodies under the severest penalties!,” according to his aesthetic of deferred exposure, “the not often seen flesh-color” of boys bathing would lose its “wildness,” we can infer, if it were to be cultivated in full—exposed to the inquiring eye; as he says in “Walking,” “I would not have every man nor every part of a man cultivated, any more than I would have every acre of earth cultivated” (*Excursions* 214). The deferred encounter with the beautiful, deferred because one’s aesthetic sensibility should always stay somewhat uncultivated, produces a sort of productive dismay in the poet—the feeling that something else and more beautiful exists just beyond the purview of our vision.

The “productive dismay” so central to his aesthetic theory can then be applied to the sensual sensation that the sight of wet, nude male bodies registers in him as well—the kind of scene that Thomas Eakins submitted to fully in his *Swimming* painting. Like the “[w]ondrous interplay between the seen and unseen” that Whitman celebrates in the “Proto-Leaf” section of *Leaves of Grass* (l. 5), the relational connection between “cultivation” (which is normative) and “concealment,” or “deferment” (being “naturally” opposed to disclosure), should remind us that preposterousness does not merely name a process of inversion but also (and more intriguingly) the “aversive” movement between two otherwise distinct terms; this

is the true potential and “possibility of inversion” (see McFarlane 34) that Thoreau helps us see. In due course, we will come to discover how this inversion *with a difference* engages two ostensibly opposed affective threads—one negative, one positive—and how they each might indicate different spatial connections: a “high” and a “low” mood. Primarily interesting in this regard is the fact that it is the “lowly” aspects of nature that appear the most exhilarating to Thoreau, and the spatial “low points” of his writings thus open up to moments of preposterous ecstasy.

However, the rhetorical aspect of the preposterous should not allow us to forget the “actual” implications that describing nude, wet bodies might hold for Thoreau. Concerning this, it is of course neither the exposition of skin nor “the desire that might accompany that exposition” (Fone, *Road* 48), but *acting* on that desire which would be met with the “severest punishment” (i.e., death). Left unstated in the *Journal*, the implication of sodomy and its legal and social censures nonetheless overshadow the passage. The fact that Thoreau’s “environmental precocity” should be accompanied “by the transfer of passion for a partner too close to oneself to the safer surrogate of the nonhuman world,” as Lawrence Buell puts it (525, note 2), might then have a more menacing basis. Exceeding the scope of the more polite and restrained epithet of “eccentric,” the very possibility of committing sodomy or being accused of harboring feelings and desires that might brand him as a sodomite would be entirely loathsome to Thoreau, perhaps not predominately due to the social and legal ramifications involved, but more so because any hint of “self-pollution” (Warner, “New England Sodom” 334) would be a detriment to his sense of spiritual and physical cleanliness. Orienting himself toward nature in a way that often seemed puzzling to his friends and family (and readers) meant that, preferring to direct his passion and desire toward natural phenomena and objects rather than engaging in human companionship, he came to inhabit a

different world altogether; he sought to create a space apart for himself where he would be relatively safe from the judgment and condemnation of others.

Not seeming to want to share himself physically with another man, preferring the comfortable distance inherent to the voyeur, the “open mood” that Thoreau experienced in penning his poem to young Edmund (see Richardson 58) was perhaps the closest he came to professing a sexually-motivated attachment to another male. He never allowed this openness to develop in a sexual direction,³⁰ however, and even as it is difficult to imagine Thoreau in the arms of another man, the self-motivated disruption or repression of this type of mood did not come without a price. As Alan D. Hodder notes, the “Former Inhabitants” chapter of *Walden* uncovers “a vision of loss and death that unsettles the Edenic world of quiet harmony that otherwise prevails throughout most of the rest of the book” (43), and this bleak mood is reflected in a moment of solitude, when he wonders what “that other life to which [he is] thus continually allured” might consist of; what is more, is this life, which he “alone love[s],” “for this world?” (qtd. in Hodder 257). While it may be that outwardly, “by the 1850s Thoreau was integrated into and engaging with society as a mature adult” (Benjamin Berger 3), the fact that he now “earned a respectable living as a surveyor” does not mean that he should suddenly have begun to prize the actual (village-life) over the imaginary (wildness).

The promise of that “other life” which he feels drawn to—without knowing how to describe it, or if it even accords with human principles—is entwined by the “distinctly Thoreauvian” affective “association of exhilaration and regret” (Hodder 35). Hodder points out the “strange, confusing, and even contradictory” nature of this association, but ultimately aims to explain Thoreau’s “appeals to some golden vision of the past” and the sense of rapture they evoke in him as “poignant reminders [...] of the spiritual heights of his youth”

³⁰ Alan D. Hodder indeed states that “[t]here is no evidence that the sensuousness widely evident in the journal ever admitted of overt sexual expression” (72).

now lost (35). (Hawthorne drew heavily on a fantastical form of nostalgia to frame his literature for children, as we shall see in Chapter 3). In this way, Hodder succeeds in reducing Thoreau's complex mood to a familiar theme common to Romantic poetry that Wordsworth expresses in the following way: "We poets in our youth begin in gladness; / But thereof comes in the end despondency and madness" ("Resolution and Independence," Stanza 7, ll. 6-7), and which Thoreau affirms when he claims that "with years I have grown more coarse and indifferent" (*Walden* 264). With age comes solitude as well. His allusions to youth in *Walden*, for example, are often accompanied with references to an unnamed "companion," as in the following passage:

Formerly I had come to this pond *adventurously*, from time to time, in dark summer nights, with a companion, and making a fire close to the water's edge, which we thought attracted the fishes, we caught pouts with a bunch of worms strung on a thread; and when we had done, far in the night, threw the burning brands high into the air like skyrockets, which coming down into the pond, were quenched with a loud hissing, and we were suddenly *groping* in total darkness. (*Walden* 221)

Although not explicitly homoerotic in nature, the words "adventurously" and "groping" in this passage imply the presence of a carefree dalliance at nighttime deep in the woods, away from the confines of society and the "sly" looks of villagers. Could making one's "home by the shore" (222) include a sexual experience? As the two companions' child-like excitement over nature's "skyrockets" is interrupted by sudden darkness, this change in mood might call upon a different sort of excitement that demands groping rather than seeing, and which is reserved for the intimacy of the tent: "My friend must be my tent companion" (September 26, 1840). Darkness in this way becomes the vehicle for his attachment. This does not bear exposure on the bright whiteness of the page—by disclosing too much, after-all, we might

come to “see [his] secret” (*October 18, 1840*).³¹ The allusion to darkness tells us something about the nature of masculine attachment in Thoreau as well, as he presents it as an experience of touch and texture. Guiding himself through the dark woods at night, he is often left “to feel with my feet the faint track which I had worn, or steer by the known relation of particular trees which I felt with my hands, passing between two pines for instance”—feeling what his “eyes [cannot] see” (*Walden* 216). As “dark and muggy night” relegates vision to a subordinate position, the proper way of exiting his hut is through “the rear of the house” (216), as if to acknowledge, architecturally, the way night appears to invert direction and how to navigate the world according to usual patterns. In different ways, as this chapter hopes to show, Thoreau eschews narcissistic identification on the basis of the inversion of vision and touch—most apparently in relation to the fragmentary figure of Walden Pond—and touching nature is perhaps less a question of displacing his desire to touch other men, as we might initially suspect, and more about discovering an erotic model that does not bear on human relationality.

We can of course only speculate as to the nature of Thoreau’s relationship with his unnamed tent companion, but the fact is that this experience inspired a kind of joy in Thoreau—as evinced by his whistling (*Walden* 221-2)—that he could not obtain in normal society. This episode depicts Thoreau in an exhilarated state of mind, but we also know that he was given to feelings of dismay and depression. However, had he not been “at odds with ‘normality,’” Buell ventures, “nothing extraordinary would have been produced [*Walden*]” (525, note 2). Thoreau’s “strangeness” serves both as the most obvious marker of his queerness and the difficulty of critics and readers to define properly his dedication to living a “border life”—that uneasy site of existence caught between the Wild and the Village. On a

³¹ I italicize all the journal entries taken from Thoreau’s so-called “Lost Journal,” collected and edited by Perry Miller in *Consciousness in Concord*.

fundamental level, therefore, the strange or contradictory must be preserved, as they are part of life. Consequently, we can agree with West when he states that, “By ignoring his weaknesses we do violence to what is strongest in [Thoreau], forgetting what he himself finely said: [...]. ‘All a man's strength and all a man's weakness go to make up the authority of any particular opinion which he may utter’” (1061). I wish to suggest that the act of reading Thoreau not only must consider the ways in which this tension plays out in and influences his style, but, moreover, that it becomes imperative to interrogate how the dialectics of “exhilaration and regret” might influence our reading experience. In this regard, Frank Kermode has suggested that the “conjunction of happiness and dismay” is central to the responsive reading of any text (see *Pleasure and Change* 8), and I am here interested in what happens when the singular impression of a text “overflows”—when no single emotion or affect might be used to describe the reading experience—thus rendering it *ek-static*. In other words, can the blending of positive and negative affects effect something like a specifically textual form of ecstasy? What Roland Barthes calls “sites of bliss”?

III. Cruising Thoreau

*You, never-arriving one, never-to-be-found sweetheart,
how can I know in advance
what songs will please you? Why go on
trying to recognize you in each moment's surge of arrival? All the strongest
impressions I retain, the experience of distance's
landscapes, cities and towers and bridges, un-
suspected twists of the path
and that violence of the Gods
when they were creating these lands – all
take on their greatest significance in you;
and yet you still elude me.*

—Rainer Maria Rilke, “You, Never-arriving One”

Cruising by its covert nature relies on secret signs that only those “in the know” will pick up on; at the same time, however, as the artist Glenn Ligon puts it, “cruising is [also] about the risk of misreading something” (Middleman 472). In *A Queer Geography*, Frank Browning describes coming back from a sojourn to the gay summer retreat on Fire Island known as “The Pines.” Upon arriving at the ferry landing on Long Island, Browning must complete the rest of his journey back to New York City by railroad shuttle. Increasingly, the “pheromones of Fire Island” are reduced to a “whiff” (198). Even so, the farther away he is pulled from the “homo-island,” the stronger his flirtation with a young “pig-tailed” man becomes (199). As the “blasé queer familiarity” of the island is changed for the “conventional zone of hetero-commuters,” they “shift [their] glances toward *unmarked coquetry*” (my emphasis); thighs are “lightly” brushed against the other’s knee; ears are cocked “to meet the modulated voice” of one’s companion (199). The transformation from direct flirtation, expressed in “the loaded language of overt camp,” to cruising, marked by “the sly double and triple entendres of invisible innuendo,” is almost seamless (199). We may then posit that cruising is about inhabiting a different kind of awareness, a “homo-knowledge,” which is titillating by the mere dint of its inconspicuous display. Cruising denotes the perusal of everyday environments for signs that might carry a specific, secret meaning—the unveiling of which depends on many different factors, such as facial expressions, bodily gestures, and so on. Cruising is also a looking and a being looked at. But the “look” of cruising is uncertain, and it is not always quite clear if we appear to the gaze of someone we are cruising in the manner we desire. How can we be sure that we become conscious to the object of our desire as someone who is cruising and, in turn, as someone who can be cruised? Are the signs we give off legible enough, or do they become lost in the over-saturated visual field of the postmodern city? How do we maintain the degree of

subtlety that cruising requires, while still being noticed? Reading the “cruising notes” of Roland Barthes that make up the diary-like text of “Evenings in Paris” found in *Incidents*, we wonder, with him, if placing one’s keys on top of one’s wallet could mean something “special” (164)? Is it a sexual proposition? Or, related to this, an indication of one’s preferred sexual position? Or might it, disappointingly, on the contrary, merely be a mundane gesture with no hidden possibility of sexual adventure?

Thoreau’s writings, enmeshed with paradoxes, weird etymologies, horticultural metaphors, and allusions and references to ancient Greece, elicit a similar kind of wonderment. Reading him we are struck by the truth of his insight that “it requires different intentions of the eye and of the mind, to attend to different departments of knowledge!” (*Excursions* 257). We might be able to approach the “different knowledge” of Thoreau by way of what Barthes’ calls “*applied* reading” (*Pleasure* 12); this is a grazing, grasping, scrupulous kind of reading (13)—akin to the “varied and free-style, insatiable cruising” that Barthes at times experienced in his own life (*Incidents* 161). As it forces us to break with our usual habits of communication, this form of reading can yield unpredictable results (bliss), but certainly also disappointment, failure, and dismay. (Peter Coviello claims in *Tomorrow’s Parties* that Thoreau indeed possessed a “genius for disappointment” [32]). To borrow from Frank Kermode, such uncertainty is the prize of wanting to transgress one’s position as “a citizen of ordinary formation” through reading (23), or substituting “common knowledge” for what Thoreau calls “Useful Ignorance” —the cultivation of an intentional “misreading” of commonplace significations that is done in order to achieve the kind of Thoreauvian “Beautiful Knowledge” that unexpected (linguistic, literary, social, sexual...) connections can produce (see *Excursions* 214).

Etymology lies at the heart of Thoreau's style. His playful genealogy of terms and concepts exemplifies how etymologies and other forms of wordplay, according to Jonathan Culler, can allow "signifiers to affect meaning by generating new connections—in short, responding to the call of the phoneme, whose echoes tell of wild realms beyond the code and suggest new configurations of meaning" (*On Puns* 3). This kind of "wild" reading, what cruising corresponds to, intuitively signals the significance of becoming unhistorical. In a hallucinatory moment, the unhistorical effect makes everything seem "so palpable, close, highly coloured, resounding, as though [we] apprehended it with all [our] sense at once" (Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations* 64). The ideal of such a reading is the overpowering of the senses in an unfocused collage of synesthetic impressions, which draw from "the cross-modal networks that register links between perception, affect, the senses, and emotions" (Highmore 120). This sensual form of chaos does not merely invert the order of things—how we are "supposed" to apprehend the world around us—but it puts into question the very possibility of making proper sense of anything. In this context, we should note that the primary, most pernicious threat of the preposterous is namely the potential instigation of "disorder's spread" (McFarlane 35).

Any reading involves risk. But preposterous reading, as it faces off against the dogma of linear logic, is particularly destructive to the workings of common sense. Considered as a form of cruising, any reading might quickly turn out to be a "misreading," and, similarly, it becomes apparent that as we are cruising Thoreau's work for queer signs we are being cruised in return. (Of course, Barthes would advise us, any "good" text must "prove" to its reader that it desires her/him [Barthes, *Pleasure of the Text* 6]). A reversal of the readerly gaze might then occur seamlessly, and our position in relation to the text can be turned round almost instantly. For the reader, the pleasure of the text comes from being exposed to

unknown, alien associations. On this point, Maurice Blanchot writes in “Literature and the Right to Death” that “the reader has no use for a work written for him, what he wants is precisely an alien work in which he can discover something unknown, a different reality, a separate mind capable of transforming him and which he can transform into himself” (27). It is not the writer as person we are here interested in merging with—it is that “otherness” of the text that entices us.

Textual cruising thus describes the attempt to extend one’s readerly reach, and takes seriously Thoreau’s own ethos of discovery (see *Walden* x 40 6). As Chisholm indicates, Neil Bartlett’s attempt at “acquainting himself with the erotic terrain of late-nineteenth-century London” (126) in an effort to “tell the story of collective coming out” (125)—of which the book *Who Was that Man?: A Present for Oscar Wilde* is the result—highlights the possibility of forging “continuity between living in the present and researching the past,” and that cruising, as a fluid practice, “overcomes the disciplinary distance and existential gap that separate city dwellers [not to mention writers and readers] from historic community” (126). In this way, we can detect in Thoreau’s etymological description of the saunterer a precursor to “the cruising flaneur” who “strolls city passages with leisurely fascination at a *loiterly*, anti-industrious pace” (Chisholm 46; my emphasis); a certain un-anxious restlessness characterizes both. And yet, following Branka Arsić, we should note that sauntering lacks that “gesture of appropriation” that characterizes the modern, urban experience of the flaneur (“Walking Dead”). At this point, we should therefore note the different connotations of “sauntering” available to us: to saunter is to travel aimlessly or unprofitably; to walk with a careless gait; to dawdle. No wonder then that Thoreau should choose this word as operative in his exploration on walking; sauntering remains as vague as his destination. Put succinctly, Thoreau’s sort of walking “has nothing in it akin to taking exercise as it is called [...] but is

itself the enterprise and adventure of the day” (*Excursions* 189). This is walking for walking’s sake. With no destination in sight, he simply “yearn[s] for one of those old meandering dry uninhabited roads which lead away from towns [...] along which you may travel like a pilgrim—going nowither” (July 21, 1851). While we can therefore say that his walking responds to certain orientations and impulses, it does not immediately take an object.

Thoreau preferred a kind of walking that, “as a river does,” proceeds “meanderingly” (*Excursions* 185). As Richard J. Schneider notes—and we may allow ourselves a certain liberty with his choice of adverb here—“[t]o go *straight* to his [Thoreau’s] destination permit[s] only subjective seeing” (113; my emphasis); meandering, on the other hand, allows for “surprises” (113). This is in line with David Faflik’s reading of the above passage from the *Journal*: “Thoreau’s first-person ‘yearn’ sends him ‘traveling’ over a disjointed patch of prose that is unfit for habitation (an ‘uninhabited’ road less traveled) by one who is not sure ‘where’ he is, let alone if he’s ‘going or coming.’ This reader seeks some other place that signifies” (“Deep Thought, Shallow Aesthetic” 71). The line that we follow into Thoreau’s work is not random, but nor is it based entirely on an unchanging volition or intention of the reader—it can, similarly, be said to “meander.” The “sidelong glance” (cf. Schneider 114) of reading—if we simultaneously grant it the connotation of “indirect,” as in the careful, somewhat haphazard trajectory of cruising—might offer us a set of new directions to follow into the text. In Barthes’ sense of the word, we therefore “apply” a geometrical angle to the kind of reading we have so far been advancing.

A non-linear directionality creates new lines of sight and new lines of desire that will influence how we view the text. Our line of desire—that which determines, at the outset, our expectation, what we need or want from the text—thus crosses with that of the text. Our desire, so to speak, is woven into the text, and the different “knots” we encounter along the

way “trouble” the line’s “straightforward linearity” (Miller, *Ariadne’s Thread* 17). (As the word “line” means linen or flax, and text has as its origin the Latin verb of “to weave,” they seem to make a nice pair indeed. Texture denotes a structure of interwoven fibers). This weaving of desire generates a plethora of “returnings, knottings, recrossings, crinklings to and fro, suspensions, interruptions” (17). According to its nautical connotation, “cruising,” the *OED* tells us, refers to the action of sailing to and fro—traveling forward to an unspecified location, only to revert back to one’s initial position, from which a new cruise can begin. Thoreau indeed employs the metaphor of “plain sailing”—denoting “easy or uncomplicated progress”³²—to describe his approach to walking as a de-subjective practice. At different points in *Walden*, Thoreau employs further nautical language to describe his walking. In “The Village” chapter, for example, as he is “sailing” in front of the hearth (215), he tells the reader how he loves

to launch myself into the night, especially if it [is] dark and tempestuous, and set sail from some bright village parlor or lecture room [...] for my snug harbor in the woods, having made all tight without and withdrawn under hatches with a merry crew of thoughts, leaving only my outer man at the helm, or even tying up the helm when it was plain sailing. (215)

At this point, we should clearly state that cruising, in the sense that we are familiar with today, of course *has* an object: sex. The way that I appropriate the term in this chapter exploits the haphazard affect and directionality that are typical of sexual cruising, in order to show the multivalent desire that is expressed in Thoreauvian sauntering—which might lack a *specific* object or goal, but which nevertheless is constitutive of a sexual orientation toward the world, I argue. (Here we should also note that “cruising” might for some be pleasurable

³² This is the definition Jeffrey S. Cramer provides in the annotated edition of *Walden* (165, note 14).

in itself, and that the object thus is not always, “objectively,” sex; the goal of cruising can therefore, in some instances, be located in the kind of movement, looking, and sensing that cruising, as a practice, promote). Thoreau’s “plain sailing” evidently communicates a pleasurable activity that is not directly sexual, but the “dark and tempestuous” woods that hide his “snug harbor” in the above passage carry an allusion to male anality, which in this instance might also be masturbatory. The connection between sauntering, or “sailing,” and anal puns will stand out the clearer once we introduce the figural preposterousness of the Pond and the Cut later in this chapter.

In relation to texts, we might here refer to different points of entry, leading to different trajectories of reading, which nonetheless appear to be somewhat circular in nature. The same can be said of Barthes’ evening ramblings through certain quarters of Paris. Ostensibly, repetition is essential to nautical, textual, and sexual forms of cruising; however, Thoreau’s preference for walking at night troubles this sense of repetition, as, when he finally returns to his cabin by Walden Pond, he is not able to “recall a single step of my walk” (*Walden* 216), and it would thus be impossible for him to retrace his steps. But becoming “lost” in the woods is essential to his ethics of walking, and I am here interested in how we might challenge our terminology of travel in the particular discussion of Thoreau as a queer kind of navigator; additionally, I want to explore the extent to which cruising, as a practice of non-normative local travel, amounts to a definition of queer space as referring to “place-making practices” that adhere to “new understandings of space enabled by the production of queer counterpublics” (Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place* 6)—or, in Thoreau’s case,

the production of what we have called a “counter-sodometry,” which rather emphasizes private over public space. Whether public or private, put very simply, “queer space is a space that challenges the hegemonic codings of everyday space” (Hepworth 93). Such a description nevertheless tends to de-prioritize the sexual element of “queer:” cruising, to the extent that it denotes a form of “counterpublic,” or “counter-sodometry,” seeks out the intermittent paths of one’s immediate milieu that flaunts the gaps in the spatial “codings” of the everyday. While Thoreauvian sauntering differs from the often more public kind of cruising that Barthes and Bersani detail, for example, Thoreau’s woods are “public” to the degree that he forms real, *and* pleasurable, relations to non-human figures in nature.

While the writer’s desire is forward-directed, reading is always in a sense back-turned, as we grapple with a desire that locates a time and space prior to the reading experience. This spatio-temporal anteriority may nevertheless generate an erotic disposition that is not lost after reading stops. The “back and forth” of writerly and readerly cruising turns the basic assumption about literary composition into an erotic game, which concerns the sexuality of rhetoric, the stimulating connections that words make for us, and that we make out of words. But, namely, “it is at the ends of things, including the ends of lines, that [writers] become one of us, their readers,” as Shane Butler suggests (23). Thus, the end gives way to the potential relationality of “the unended,” from the vantage point of which “we catch a glimpse of the [writer] who is still a living author, still, after all [this time]” (23), meeting our backward glance. Textual cruising thus speaks to the tension between the backward- and forward-directed glances that turns the text into a potentially a-temporal arena of pleasure, trading in the incessant, preposterous substitution of anterior/posterior and vice versa. As Roland Barthes puts it in *The Pleasure of the Text*:

I must seek out this reader (must “cruise” him) *without knowing where he is*. A site of bliss is then created. It is not the reader’s “person” that is necessary to me, it is this site: the possibility of a dialectics of desire, of an *unpredictability* of bliss: the bets are not placed, there can still be a game. (4)

The excess, or *jouissance*, of the text is created by the anticipation of the relation between writer and reader *to-come*. But all those “returnings,” “knottings,” and “recrossings” prevent this relation from ever completely taking form. The potential pathways and circuits that Barthes’ site of bliss opens up to may lead us to a somewhat utopian approach to textual scholarship, but the Barthesian project disavows the impulse to foresee or contain the reader’s experience; the dialectics of pleasure and pain, exhilaration and regret, is what prompts the “to and fro-ness” of cruising, and, at the same time, we should note that what propels the writer’s cruising of the reader is the trajectory of a desire that he can attempt to follow but never possess.

In the same way, as readers, we may find that the desire of the writer appears more or less obscure to us, due to her/his particular form or style. In the specific case of Thoreau, his affinity for patching together his terminology based on a not altogether faithful appropriation of the etymology of different words sometimes makes it difficult for the reader to follow him. But this difficulty proves integral to his project of rhetorical “disobedience.” For example, as Joseph J. Moldenhauer points out in the Textual Notes to “Walking,” Thoreau in his essay expands on Dr. Johnson’s definition of “to saunter,” as meaning “to wander about idly, loiter” (197), adding the phrase “going *à la sainte terre*” (185), which he probably appropriated from John Ray’s *A collection of English Words Not Generally Used* (84)³³—and

³³ The full entry from John reads: “To *santer* about, Or go santering up and down. It is derived from *Sainte terre*, i.e. The Holy Land, because of old Time, when there were frequent Expeditions thither, many idle

it is namely this religious connotation of the saunterer (rendered by Thoreau, idiosyncratically, as “holy-lander”) that Thoreau is interested in, as it represents a purposiveness that has nothing to do with any utilitarian aim or *telos* as such; if his sauntering is aimed anywhere it is at that “serene friendship-land,” in which we might, with a “gentle” companion, make “a pledge of holy living” (January 26, 1840). The connotation of “holy” remains vague, other than that it correlates to a spatio-temporal principle undeterred by the common vagaries of everyday life. However vague, we can here draw on the insight of Linda Munk in her book *The Trivial Sublime*, in which she shows how Thoreau would employ a strategy “of reclaiming for secular purposes the rhetoric of religion” (88). Munk’s specific example relates to Thoreau’s description of “a purification rite of ‘savage nations’”—“sacrament” is the central word Thoreau revises to fit an “unfamiliar context” (a phrase Munk borrows from R. W. B. Lewis), in order to escape the confines of orthodoxy (88). “Holiness” in the “new image” of male (possibly homoerotic) friendship retains the former, theological connotation, but Thoreau adds his own sentiment to make it unique to his situation.

The “holy-lander” (another word for the Thoreauvian saunterer) seeks not to conquer a certain space, but rather aims her or his movement in a direction away from the beaten path of the high-way (*Excursions* 187). As Michel de Certeau in “Reading as Poaching” links reading to a passivity inherent to consumer culture, reading in this manner, he offers, “is to wander through an imposed system (that of the text, analogous to the concentrated order of a city or of a supermarket)” (169). Today, according to de Certeau, reading has become mundane and uninspired, in other words. Readerly cruising denotes a sort of holiday from this type of everyday reading—it is a means of striving for the “inaccessible horizon,”

Persons went from Place to Place, upon Pretence that they had taken, or intended to take, the Cross upon them, and to go thither. It signifies to idle up and down, to go loitering about [cf. Johnson]” (84).

moving beyond the “restrictive space” of the everyday that post-industrialist humanity experiences “as a pressure which torments [us]” (Bollnow 87). This stems from the general fact that, as the German philosopher Otto Frederick Bollnow concludes from his etymological findings, the “urge to expansion” is inherent to the human condition (87). But, at the same time, we may compare the cruising wanderer “to the bee who flies from flower to flower (from book to book) in order to prepare its honey” (Butler, *The Matter of the Page* 80). At the heart of queerness, Zachary Lamm suggests in his review of Ahmed’s *Queer Phenomenology*, is exactly the production of “alternative worldly orientations” (590), which cannot necessarily be figured as human or nonhuman, we should add. As a sublimated activity, then, literary cruising, as it relates to this general “urge,” “designates the open field of a forward movement, out of an oppressive confinement” (Bollnow 87). The to and fro-ness of cruising is certainly “undirected” (87), but is it always forward directed? Might someone’s cruising not be backward directed, orientated around a point in the past? The mandated onward movement of industrial progress works in conjunction with already established conventions and impetuses of linearity, as we saw in relation to the development of modern pedagogy. In order to find a point of expansion that responds to different, non-teleological desires, cruising might take a preposterous turn, and this spatial inversion *and* diversion has a temporal component that I will explore in the following section.

IV. Cruising the Dead

For an example of how textual or readerly cruising can unfold, I will turn to a poem by David Oates that was recently published in the journal of ecological literary criticism, *ISLE*. In this poem, “Thoreau on Fire Island,” Oates attempts to reignite the utopian,

homoerotic potential that Thoreau was never quite able to summon or act on. In this way, Oates, we might say, by “fashioning thus an intimacy with the writer whom [we] otherwise can’t touch,” as D. A. Miller says about his relationship to Barthes (*Bringing Out 7*), anachronistically imbues Thoreau with prophetic powers that he himself failed to imagine in life; in effect, Oates imagines Thoreau’s texts to be anticipating some future desire, which actually belongs to our present moment of reading. Oates is looking for a certain kind of Thoreau that he admits is “imaginary” (l. 15). But Thoreau, of course, found the imaginary to be far more real than the actual, and in a journal entry that would have come after July 29, 1850, as the Princeton edition of the *Journal* tells us, he wrote that, “In proportion as that which possesses my thoughts is removed from the actual[,] it impresses me;” the actual does not “touch” him—only his dreams affect him. Perhaps, then, it is because his “acquaintances” did not share his view on reality, or failed to grasp the kind of perceptive apparatus he operated with, that they were not able to approach his true self, as he further indicates in his journal.

Oates, however, seems to think that he has “found” him out. In the same way as Thoreau suggests that “[w]e find only the world we look for” (cf. Richardson 355), it is also true that we only find the Thoreau we look for. Having been rendered imaginary, and far removed from the very real societal and sexual constraints of his nineteenth century, might lead to the actualization of his homoeroticism, Oates hopes. As lines 14-5 of his poem reads: “now that he’s imaginary / maybe he’d permit at last the actual: one sunburned kiss” (ll. 14-5). On Thoreau’s trip to learn what had become of Margaret Fuller’s remains and her possessions following the wreck of the *Elizabeth*—which had been carrying her and her family from Italy back to the US—Thoreau examined parts of a human skeleton that had washed up on the shore; of this he remarked that it “possessed the shore as no living [body]

could” (qtd. in Richardson 213). Likewise, as Thoreau could with no certainty identify this body to be that of Fuller (indeed it was not), Oates’ poem of course does not manage to recover something like the “authentic” Thoreau; the Thoreau who strove “to live a *super* natural life” supersedes Oates’ imaginative fumbblings, and, in this way, perhaps it can be said that Thoreau possesses the text as no living reader could. His poem, motivated by what we might call Thoreau’s coyness, or unattainability (“dead these many years, and quicksilver when alive” [l. 6]), is burning with a desire to produce a cruiserly space out of the Thoreauvian archive of landscape descriptions, where the poet can proximate the object of his fascination. In this place, Thoreau would presumably not be “looking for a woman, of all things...”, as the snarky first line of Oates’ poem has it. Transplanted into our contemporary moment and geography—Fire Island is today a gay resort—impels us to investigate further the perceptual and ontological dissonances of Oates’ trans-phenomenology. Oates’ poem resembles Ned Rorem’s prose poetic lines from his memoir, *Lies: A Diary, 1986-1999*, lamenting how “I can never meet and sniff and love, say, Thomas Eakins. Not his painting, but the finite trembling man. I long for his flesh, which was gone before I was born” (265). The particular use of the word “trembling” speaks to a reverberation in time and space. As what Amardeep Singh calls a texture-word, “to tremble” is a synonym of “to quiver,” which, according to Singh, belongs to the family of desire, or *frisson*, words.³⁴ “These words express textures of moving bodies,” Singh explains, and texture in general, as how Singh understands it, has the capacity to blur “not only [...] the line between surface and depth [but also] the animate/inanimate, and spatial/temporal distinction;” thus, texture-words indicate to us something about what Ben Highmore has termed “the murky connections between fabrics and feelings,” for example (119). Like the preposterous—which “carries with it the sense of

³⁴ <http://www.lehigh.edu/~amsp/texto.html>

things being not simply out of place or out of order, but out of control” (McFarlane 35)—texture-words point to the potential of touch to confuse the binary logic by which we are accustomed to making sense of things, to the degree that bodies are seen to intermingle across boundaries such as space and time. As Highmore further puts it, “The interlacing of sensual, physical experience (here, the insistent reference to the haptic realm—touch, feel, move) with the passionate intensities of love, say, [...] makes it hard to imagine untangling them, allotting them to discrete categories in terms of their physicality or their ideational existence” (120). The “crinkling” of the text that J. Hillis Miller addresses, hence, comes as the result of the affective reading experience that—while a particularly intense reading experience might result in several creased and wrinkled pages—engages with and influence the “ideational,” or perhaps ontological, “existence” of the text. Rorem’s “trembling” thus specifically addresses the content of his yearning on the page, which consequently becomes the reader’s. Texture is directly tied to pleasure in reading. But if, as Barthes claims, the reader’s pleasure is predicated on the “abrasions [we] impose upon the fine surface” of the work (*Pleasure* 11-2), by disregarding the writer’s labor, are we then, at the same time, in danger of losing sight of the writer’s pleasure? Surely, Oates’ “Thoreau” is created and sustained as a point of identification on the path towards a queerer future that will recognize, among other writers of his ilk, his proper “place in the history of modern homosexuality” (Love 40); the violence of reading, however, ensures that the connections of this future community are anything but smooth.

As such, appropriating Miller’s insight concerning his own cruising of Barthes’ texts, “[a]ny knowledge [we are] able to produce of a ‘gay’ [Thoreau] [is] fashioned within the practices and relations, real and phantasmatic, of gay community, and across the various inflections given to such community by, for example, nation and generation” (*Bringing Out*

6). Are the historical misrecognitions that this “knowledge” invariably produces tenable, however? At what point does our imagination or desire blind us to the historical person, or perhaps even destroy their semblance? While safe and “playful,” it appears finally disingenuous and potentially politically feeble to stake our “existence in the present [...] on being able to imagine [figures of the past] reaching out to us,” as Heather Love also recognizes (40). In this context, we should furthermore remember the imperative of *noli me tangere* (“don’t touch me”) that Jesus purportedly addressed to Mary Magdalene after the Resurrection (see Love 39). Indeed, we must question the extent to which our readerly touch has the power to annul death—to bring forth into the light of day, through incantation, the full presence of someone who can only exist by virtue of the undead letter on the page. Cruising the dead in fact becomes a form of necrophilia.

By wanting to share in the circumstances of a historical person—presuming that s/he, as Love warns, will always “yield[] to, even warm[] to the touch of the queer historian” (39)—one runs the risk of perpetrating an act of violence against that person; why should we presume that the dead wants to be disturbed? For, as Love further cautions, we must always consider “the potential resistance of [historical] figures” (39-40) to our contemporary “touch.” Advancing this point, Renu Bora defines “touch” in terms of appropriation and invasiveness: “For touch and physical pressure transform the materials one would like to know, assess, love” (99). As Bora quotes Sartre, we further learn that “the caress is not a simple stroking it is a *shaping*” (Bora 100). In a literary context, this form of “shaping” is thus a way of making *room* in the text for one’s desire. Bollnow has shown that, according to etymology, room (he uses the German, “Raum,” as an example) is “in the widest sense the ‘elbow-room’ for a movement” (33); further, “space,” in the original sense, as it denotes the clearing of space, “is not already in existence per se, but is created only by human activity,

by the clearing of the wilderness (which is therefore not a 'space')" (34). Now, the text, of course, exists as space before the reader enters the equation, but the reader's activity expands the space of the text by creating a corridor between past and present; and as we here refer to the place of the reader in the text, we should bear in mind that "place" originally implies a certain "extension in space" (Bollnow 41).

The degree to which we can expand the text is somewhat blocked by the alien presence of the writer, however. The form of extension that the reader adds to the text, thus, cannot happen without subtraction. In other words, it is possible that by investing too heavily in "lifting the repression" in the writings of a dead person (Miller, *Bringing Out* 6) we might, in turn, fall victim to a different sort of "blindness"—a foundational blindness of eroticism. As we attempt to alleviate a certain kind of "*erotic pessimism* by producing with [the writer], *against him*, a sexuality that [can then] become 'ours'" (7; final emphasis mine), are we not merely reaching out to touch a cipher of our own desire? What are we really shaping here? In touching historical figures we are, put bluntly, only ever "stroking" ourselves. Miller, thus, does not seem to offer a way out of the narcissistic impasse so familiar to psychoanalysis. However, perhaps we do not need to be satisfied with this reading: rather than an erotics based on Imaginary identification, perhaps it is through "the coy or hapless intermittences" of a text, because "discreet" (*Pleasure* 6), that we can most clearly "touch upon" a writer's desire. Barthes' theory of cruising in literature subtends an erotics of "intermittence" (10), which—opposed to the gradual unveiling, or "striptease," of the narrative where "the entire excitation takes refuge in the *hope* of seeing the sexual organ [...] or in knowing the end of the story (novelistic satisfaction)" (10)—depends for its effect on the unexpected flash of skin between two articles of clothing. Textual intermittence, similarly, denotes those

moments of excitement when the glimmer of something “other” flashes between two signifiers.

In *Queer/Early/Modern*, Carla Freccero has made the far-reaching, and potentially disingenuous, claim that “all textuality, when subjected to close reading, can be said to be queer” (5). Can all close reading, similarly, be said to be a form of cruising? This would depend on the particular signs and texture of the text, and how the reader responds to the “touch” of the text, we would have to answer. Reading as cruising—which leads to new sites of composition—in this way, describes the reader’s desire to inhabit the same terrain as the writer, but this can only become a failed attempt at intimacy—without however extinguishing the titillating potential of proximity, which is the very definition of desire.³⁵ The initial “puzzlement” that a first-time reading of *Walden*, for example, is likely to elicit, according to Robert B. Ray (6), might in fact form a more sustained involvement with Thoreau’s work. The puzzling element of Thoreau is, furthermore, probably what prompts Ray to form a repetition-based methodology for reading *Walden*, inspired by Thoreau’s own approach to discovery and surveying. But does repetition guarantee results? While we may hope, with Ray, “that each new encounter, arrived at by a different route, will produce what Thoreau celebrates—the capacity to find joy in the repetitions that constitute so much of our lives” (8)—no one certain reading technique can offer us any such reassurance; the same is true of cruising, and “hope”—with its anxious deferral of gratification—is indeed the operative word in both contexts.

³⁵ Commenting on Plato’s *Symposium*, Henry Staten in *Eros in Mourning* points out that, according to Platonic idealism, “desire must aim at the continued possession of or proximity to what is desired [...]. Conceived in this way, eros is the *origin of idealism*” (2).

V. The Geometry of Cruising

As a way to more clearly envision the two-pronged process of arriving and leaving simultaneously that we have just described, we can turn to one of Thoreau's favorite metaphors—that of the parabola. In “Walking,” Thoreau imagines the direction of his walk as being bounded according to the curvature of a parabola, the “non-returning curves” of which will never meet (*Excursions* 195). Since, figuratively, a parabola, the *OED* tells us, may describe a “curving trajectory” moving through time or space, its “cometary orbit[]” (*Excursions* 195) would figure as the projection of the reader's desire into the past, while the text, as we experience it in the present moment, would figure what we might call the terrain of our “cruising-room,” denoting the extent to which our touch *extends* into the text. The variable curvature of the parabola is less constrained than that of a circle, but still bounded, we should note. The bounded space of the parabola, in this way, comes to denote a region of desire. “In him,” Thoreau says of his ideal friend, “are the spaces which my orbit traverses” (*October 20, 1840*). The metaphor of orbital travel is central to how he experiences nature and the potential of male intimacy. In a metonymic way, he posits a regional overlap between two different, yet related, regions of desire. How can the regional model, or what in phenomenology is referred to as the individual's “field of action,” help us determine the ways in which different “fields” intersect? What is the shared desire of reader and writer, and does this influence, or how is it influenced by, the spatiality of the text?

Pointing out the futility of attempting to compile a complete encyclopedia of the world, Emerson alludes to the figure of the parabola in the essay “Intellect”: “year after year our [scientific] tables get no completeness, and at last we discover that our curve is a parabola, whose arcs will never meet” (2:201). In this instance, the incomplete parabola, as

metaphor, clearly figures the lack of complete commensurability between the subject and the world. However, Thoreau, in *A Week*, suggests that, by keeping with the orbital figure of the parabola, one's specific field of action or experience might very well meet with, or at the very least be influenced by, that of another:

There are perturbations in our orbits produced by the influence of outlying spheres, and no astronomer has ever yet calculated the elements of that undiscovered world which produces them. I perceive in the common train of my thoughts a natural and uninterrupted sequence, each implying the next, or, *if interruption occurs it is occasioned by a new object being presented to my senses*. But a steep, and sudden, and by these means unaccountable transition, is that from a comparatively narrow and partial, what is called common sense view of things, to an infinitely expanded and liberating one, from seeing things as men describe them, to seeing them as men cannot describe them. This implies a sense which is not common, but rare in the wisest man's experience; which is sensible or sentient of more than common. (386; emphasis mine)

I quote this passage at length since it so accurately sums up Thoreau's preoccupation with "uncommon" knowledge, which we might also refer to as "arbitrary" knowledge (see Chisholm 126). It is interesting to note how a world beyond description opens up in the moment when his concentration, or "common train of thought," is interrupted by the occurrence of a "liberating" object, which comes creeping into focus from outside the purview of one's immediate experience of, or orientation towards, the world. Without touching on all the issues involved, here it will prove helpful to examine briefly Sara Ahmed's recent "queering" of phenomenology.

In the phenomenological understanding of how human beings find themselves in the world, Ahmed writes that one's orientation in space, or the ability "to extend into phenomenal space," is governed by "the purposefulness of the body:" "the body does things, and space thus takes shape as a field of action" (65). From Ahmed's explication of Merleau-Ponty, we learn that this field of action contains certain objects that, over time, we have been taught to approach and handle in ways specific to the so-called "normative dimension," which is "the effect of the repetition of bodily actions over time" (66); in other words, we have become habituated toward the world in a certain way based on how our parents and their parents were taught, and—through a Foucauldian sort of "disciplining," we might infer—our bodies are made to conform to the imperatives that the interaction with correctly aligned objects demands of us (see Ahmed 130). The result is a verticalization of our lived space, where things line up according to a predictable grid-like organization of the visual world: "Things seem 'straight' (on the vertical axis), when they are 'in line,' which means when they are aligned with other lines" (66). As a consequence, things are deemed beyond "reach" to the extent that they do not line up with the sanctioned coordinates of social space, and if otherwise "reachable" objects suddenly appear "wonky" or "queer" in relation to normative space, they will become subject to "realignment" (66).³⁶ It is not difficult to see how this "general or universal orientation toward the world" would affect queer bodies (67). A queer perspective on the world might then run the risk of becoming permanently "disoriented." But such a feeling of disorientation could be experienced as "joyful" (20) or liberating, and a slantwise view at things would, in this way, afford us a different visual register, encompassing lines that take us "nowither" *in particular*, but rather explores the affective space thus opened up by a desire to look *otherwise*. It seems fitting that a queer

³⁶ This can furthermore be related to the "sideways growth" of queer childhood that Kathryn Bond Stockton describes in *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century*.

phenomenology should also include a “rear-wise” view of things—one that includes what Maurice Merleau-Ponty has called a “de-formed” perspective—affirming the influence of the preposterous, which “functions as marker of the disruption of orders based on linearity, sequence, and place” (Parker, “Preposterous Events” 188).

In the key text “The Primacy of Perception and Its Philosophical Consequences,” Merleau-Ponty is careful to state, with his precursor, Husserl, that the synthesis or unity of the perceptual world is one of “transition,” as each object in the world “is given as the infinite sum of an indefinite series of perspectival views in each of which the object is given but in none of which is it given exhaustively” (50). Any object, from whatever point of view we happen to be occupying in a given moment, will necessarily appear to us “deformed” (51), since not all its sides can be visible to us at the same time; due to the physical limitations of the optic organ, we lack the pure view of the object’s complete formation—hence, it will appear in a fragmentary state to us (*de*-formed). As any number of “perspectival views” are at once available to us, depending on how we position ourselves in the world, how we define a particular object comes down to the “style,” Merleau-Ponty says, with which we approach it (51). Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological perspective of course echoes Thoreau’s description of transitioning into “an infinitely expanded” point of view, which can only be achieved, however, by becoming less of a subject. The “style” of cruising that I evoke in this chapter is particularly sensitive to the way in which objects might appear “de-formed,” as in being not quite put-together, or how, proleptically, their formation always remains *to-come*—an object can only attain any kind of completeness according to how our desire pictures it, finding ourselves in “pieces” wherever we may wander (or cruise).

As a point of difference to Thoreau’s figure of the parabola, the trajectory of the reader approaching his or her object of desire (the text in lieu of the writer) should perhaps

rather be considered asymptotic—the asymptote in fact de-forms the parabola—in that our path can never quite intersect with the object of our affection, the writer; like Thoreau’s ideal friend, we never seem “to anchor in [his] harbor” (*October 19, 1840*). Both in the psychoanalytical tradition and existentialist philosophy, pure intimacy is never achieved, if this is to be understood as the fusing of desiring subject and desired object. With reference to Sartre’s thought, for example, it becomes clear that achieving a final, totalized union between subject and object would make it impossible to even speak of intimacy proper anymore, since both subject and object “would disappear in the total indistinction of reciprocal relations” (Sartre 407). This is rather the Romantic “I” of Fichte or Schelling, becoming, as Slavoj Žižek puts it in *Tarrying with the Negative*, “the singular subject-object given to itself in the ‘intellectual intuition,’ the ‘eye which sees itself’” (19). In opposition to this extreme form of idealism, Sartre rather contends that in order to be able to speak of any kind of “world,” we must hold that, “things are precisely ‘things-which-exist-at-a-distance-from-me’” (407).

The text as constituting a cruising ground should thus be thought of as a series of asymptotes, forming a line of potential, yet deferred, or inaccessible points of intimacy. (Is this how we can ultimately express intimacy, through failure?). Drawing on geometry for yet another example, we can say that the pair reader/writer would look like a hyperbola (plate 3), consisting of two open “branches” or bow-like curves. (Imagine, in a three-dimensional space, that the two branches of the hyperbola were inverted and one tilted 180-degrees—we would then have a visual metaphor for a near-consummate embrace between two individuals that nevertheless remains deferred, or suspended).

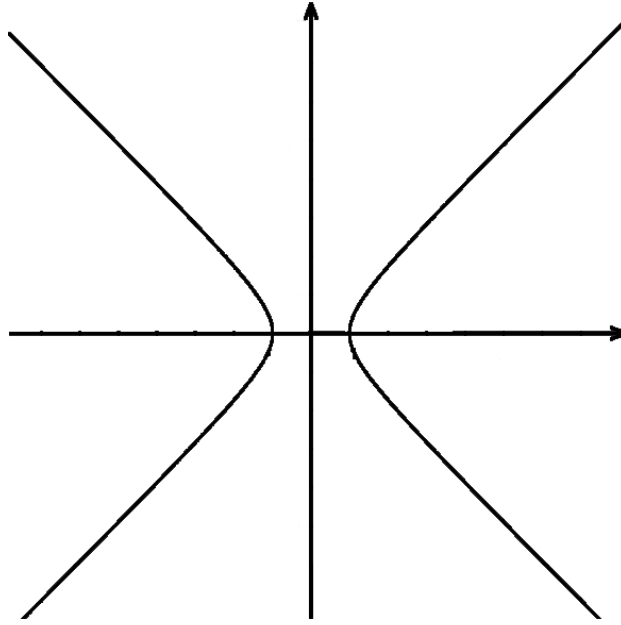


Plate 3: Hyperbola

In *The Logic of the Lure*, John Paul Ricco provides the following insight: “The movement that is cruising may be from point to point, although always as a spatial proximics rather than a spatial convergence, since it is a movement towards a point, and another, and still another, only to leave each of them behind” (9). And yet we keep hoping—hoping that some day our incessant cruising of strangers, texts, even literary figures long dead will yield some kind of permanence, an anchoring point of contact, a textual embrace. Lest this inspire melancholy in the reader, we should here remind ourselves that cruising—as I have presented it in this chapter—is not necessarily about the outcome but rather the act itself as well as the unexpected significations it might produce. Cruising is achieved through what Sartre calls an “*engaged knowledge*” of the world (407), but if we apply this phrase to the Barthesian “varied and free-style” methodology of “applied” reading, we might ask if an “engagement” with the world always produces a specific knowledge about the things we encounter? If being-in-the-world means that we are thrust into that world, that we can only situate ourselves in the world by virtue of the fact that we appear “there” next to something, what

would it mean to invert “high” and “low”—to place an object on its head (a table, for example)?

VI. The “Something More” of Cruising: The Lowly Life

[T]he very measure we use to test the truth of our knowledge-claims is always caught in the process of testing [...]. [W]e—finite, historical subjects—forever lack any measuring-rod which would guarantee our contact with the Thing itself.

—Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative*

Through a reconsideration of Hegel’s idealism, Žižek is here describing “the vicious circle” of experience itself (21): we cannot measure the measuring-rod of Truth without having to invent a new measuring-rod to test the knowledge thus arrived at, and so on. Put differently, we can only access the Thing itself in a fragmentary way—as an imperfect, or lacking, synecdoche of experience; this inability to finally “know” the All, however, is at the same time what propels our desire as human subjects. As he is describing what he observed on a trip to Fair Haven Pond, Thoreau notes that he saw “something more” (appropriately stated in parenthesis in the original) than “a strip of perfectly smooth water [...] & two hawks sailing over it” (February 14, 1851), and yet he does not know “what these things can be”—they are in excess of what his “understanding” is able to comprehend in terms of his “objective awareness,” and he is not able to measure its impact according to positivistic tools or methods of surveying; in other words, his experience at Fair Haven Pond goes beyond the reality principle, exposing “a nature behind the ordinary” (*Week* 383). Peter Blakemore has noted that Thoreau, at one point in his life, was becoming concerned that by adopting the scientist’s “taxonomic method of division” he might not be able to see things in their greater

context (115), or worse he might deny “himself access to their potential to startle,” as Jane Bennett puts it (4). As a result, we might even find him sympathetic to Wordsworth’s attack on “meddling” science, as expressed in the poem “The Tables Turned,” in which stanza 7 concludes with the following line: “We murder to dissect” (l. 28). However, Thoreau was less anxious to repudiate science, since, to him, poetry exists in a sphere apart, and “mortal eye can never dissect it [poetry]” (December 2, 1846). Regardless, Thoreau felt that having adopted “the eye of science” (see Ray 40) had put him in danger of losing access to those “beauteous forms of things” (l. 27) that Wordsworth had sought to protect from what Richard Holmes calls “the reductive effects of science” (319).³⁷ As Thoreau notes in a journal entry from 1851, “I see details not wholes nor the shadow of the whole” (August 19, 1851). The way he solved this problem of the macro- versus the microscopic, according to Blakemore, was by developing “a method of local travel” (115); in other words, he mobilized “a different way of seeing” (115) by turning surveying into a matter of corporeality and movement, substituting feet for eyes, low for high, rear for front. His rear-ward and “lowly” approach to surveying and sauntering subsequently becomes a way of re-discovering the “beauteous forms” of nature that might have been obscured by the “eye” of science. This ties in with Thoreau’s general project of “forgetting” himself, becoming less domesticated in and through nature, while, at the same time, recalling for us the productive tension between cultivation and concealment.

Paradoxically, his ignorance of what he saw at Fair Haven nevertheless comes to constitute a moment of knowledge. Transported out of his usual apparatus of perception the threshold of his cruising begins to take shape. As previously stated, cruising requires a different form of intentionality that common knowledge does not provide for. The

³⁷ Conceivably, this is why, to some critics, Thoreau’s later work, post-*Walden*, became imbued with “a confusing and unmethodical vacillation between science and literature,” as Michael Benjamin Berger notes (2).

“something more” that Thoreau experiences translates into a cognition that goes beyond the everyday, and he here prefigures the paradox of perception as formulated by Merleau-Ponty, namely that the things of the world “always recede beyond their immediately given aspects” (51); as such, the “something more” belongs to the “transcendental” element of perception. However, this “absence” inherent to the object, even as it becomes present to us in the moment of perception, at the same time, gives us access “to a horizon of an indefinite number of perspective views which blend with one another according to a given style, which defines the object in question” (51). As I am of course interested in the particular “style” of cruising, I want to focus on Thoreau’s different and lowly “perspective views” that intersect with this.

Commenting on Merleau-Ponty’s *The Phenomenology of Perception*, Jacques Lacan calls attention to how “not only by the subject’s eye, but by his [sic] expectations, his movement, his grip, his muscular and visceral emotion [affect]” come to form “what is called his total intentionality” (*The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* 71). In his sustained description of Walden Pond, Thoreau pays heed to the fact that one’s intentionality is in fact often prompted by forces outside the subject. During a nighttime fishing excursion by boat out on the pond, he describes how the physical world seeks to arrest his meandering thoughts: “it was very queer, especially in dark nights, when your thoughts had wandered to vast and cosmogonical themes in other spheres, to feel this faint *jerk*, which came to interrupt your dreams and link you to Nature again” (*Walden* 222). The surprise of a certain odd sensation (a “jerk”), in this way, is seen to accompany his leisurely, unencumbered nighttime cruising across the rippling surface of the pond. Important to note here is the fact that his cruising—the to and fro of his boat’s movement—is sustained by nature’s own pulse, and the jerking motion happens at a point when it appears as if the natural world feels jealous of his

inner cosmogony—and wanting to reconnect, so to speak, it jerks him out of his reverie; this moment also allows Thoreau to reconnect with his own physicality in the absence of other people. The scene is tranquil, and nighttime sailing—on foot or by boat—serves as a counterpoint to the loneliness he otherwise expressed, as in the ode to Edmund Sewall, for example.

The experience of texture becomes significant here, as his communication “with mysterious nocturnal fishes” takes place by way of “a long flaxen line” that he drags after the boat (222). (As the reader will recall, the word “line” comes from “flax,” and is further related to “weaving,” and in this way “flaxen line” can almost be considered a redundancy). The movement of the “prowling” fish below sends “slight vibration[s]” up through his fishing line, and the effect of their “blundering purpose” (222), we might imagine, would not be unlike the experience of strangers brushing by us in a crowded street. But Thoreau’s experience is not that of being “jostled” in a crowded street, like the speaker of Baudelaire’s *Fleurs du mal*, which is “shocking” rather than titillating (see Benjamin, “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire”), or might even render the very sense of touch “banal.” Commenting on Baudelaire and Benjamin’s musings on the effect of crowds, Michael Cobb states that in a crowded situation, “There’s really too much touch, too much pressing, to be truly moved or excited” (216). If, in this case, “Closeness has come at the expense of distance” (216), claustrophobia substituted for alienation, Thoreau’s “fishes” remain distant and, hence, “mysterious,” separated as they are by the surface-sheen of the pond. Be that as it may, he achieves a level of intimacy with these creatures of the depth despite, or rather, as a result of this distance; they embody for him, momentarily and minutely, a delicate, staccato-like “shock of otherness” (Bersani, “Sociability and Cruising” 61). This alien connection relies on a subtly textured affect that disorders our usual arrangement of surface/depth.

In fishing terminology, the “lure” is the means by which fish are enticed to move from the water’s depth to the surface, and, as a metaphor, the lure, then, comes to indicate the traversal between surface and depth.³⁸ At this point, we shall find it helpful to consider the thesis of David Faflik’s recent article, “Deep Thought, Shallow Aesthetic: Reading Surface Meaning in Thoreau,” in which he “employ[s] surface as a disruptive device” (63), as “the involution of Romantic reading” (62). Surface is not antithetical to depth, as he goes on to point out, however, and examining “the two sides of this interpretive pairing [...] is to recognize that a full spectrum of nonantithetical interpretive positions are available to readers as well” (63). This recalls for us the potential of preposterous reading to not simply turn binary logic upside down, but rather to examine the full effect of fronting a repudiated term, as it influences the entirety of a particular discourse or figural system (see McFarlane 34). Emphasizing that “the dialectical pairing of opposites keeps alternate readings in play” agrees with the sodomitical discourse of McFarlane, for example, but since Faflik tends to disavow “[d]eep reading” as “passive reliance on Emersonian transcendence” (65) his “inversion” remains somewhat static. Contrasting this, preposterous reading renders the *preference* for either depth or surface redundant, as we are more interested in how preposterousness influences a *wider* perspective on the world, through a consideration of texture and affect, for instance.

The distance between Thoreau and his ostensible prey is fairly shortened by the experience of texture and its attenuating affect; the “something more” that attends to his cruising is then largely haptic in nature, and the “jerky” pleasure of Thoreau’s night-time fishing expedition transcends the depth/surface dialectic. The attention to texture in Thoreau appears to render binary logic inoperative, and it “resists the Romantic ‘push past’ the most

³⁸ I am indebted to Bryce Traister for pointing out the connection between the metaphorical and functional property of the fishing lure.

accessible ‘line’ of a text, so as to respond to the ‘abundance of textures’ and ‘color’ that reside there without concealment” (Faflik, “Deep Thought, Shallow Aesthetic” 73). Again, Amardeep Singh’s web-project on texture-words provides us with a categorization tool that might help us identify the particular affect of this passage. We can group the word “jerk” with those texture-words that Singh refers to as desire or *frisson* words—such as “quiver,” “quaver,” and “waver,” for example. As we will recall, typical of this group of words is that they “express textures of moving bodies.” Texture in general, Renu Bora explains—and Singh’s project is in large part indebted to his essay “Outing Texture”—“signifies the surface resonance or quality of an object or material. That is, its qualities if touched, brushed, stroked, or mapped, would yield certain properties and sensations that can usually be anticipated by looking” (98). Privileging surface, therefore, if only momentarily and marked by the particular situation, results in a new series of affective resonances. In the instance of the jerk that Thoreau feels, the *frisson*, or emotional thrill, would be associated with the somewhat coarse texture of the flax line moving gently across the palm of his hand; the fishing-line mediates the movement of the fish below, and the blurring of the boundary between inanimate/animate is namely one of the key features of texture, Singh informs us. Now, the “thrill” in question would appear to depend on the roughness or smoothness of the skin. Bora states that in Henry James’ *The Ambassadors*, the main literary example of Bora’s text, “The emergence of tactility usually involves thrills of the manual, the embodiment of touch” (117). Thoreau certainly thrills at manual work, as perhaps most vividly “The Bean-Field” chapter of *Walden* will remind us. In “Walking,” however, “a certain roughness of character,” he lectures, “will cause a thicker cuticle to grow over some of the finer qualities of our nature [...] as severe manual labor robs the hands of some of their delicacy of touch” (189). The thickness of skin thus developed, both metaphorically and in a tactile sense, which

can decrease our “sensibility to certain impressions,” “is a scurf that will fall off fast enough,” he reassures us, and the “callous palms of the laborer are conversant with finer tissues of selfrespect and heroism whose touch thrills the heart, than the languid fingers of idleness” (189-90). What the inconsistencies of this passage evoke is that the luxuriant, plush or glossy textures procured and produced by the emergent American bourgeoisie have no depth. It takes the hands of someone who has experienced the rough- and gruffness of earthy and wild abodes—someone who is not afraid to dig into the mucky recesses of life without wearing kid-gloves—to be able to properly appreciate and distinguish the finer, hence virtuous, textures of existence. As he says in a poem simply titled “Manhood,” to a child-like man, “uninjured by all worldly taint” (l. 2), he prefers a “mature soul of lesser innocence” (l. 5), who, having “travelled far on life’s dusty road” (l. 7), “proudly bears his small degen’racy” (l. 9). Thoreau’s hands are in any case not so coarse (or perhaps they are just coarse enough) that they are not able to detect the “slight vibration[s]” of his fishing line that the “prowling” (cruising?) prey (predator?) circle around; this is consonant with the “thinness” of character that we introduced at the beginning of this chapter: “aspirations of virtue is but a superficies and I know not if it be thick or thin—but the features are made up of successive layers of performance—and show the thickness of the character” (October 25, 1840).

In his analysis of the Hitchcock film *Rope*, D. A. Miller points out the versatility of rope: at one moment, a piece of rope might “dangle” or “tauten[] like a penis,” the next it could just as well “encircle[] and tighten[] like a sphincter” (“Anal Rope” 138). Miller is punning on the title of the film in an effort to understand the braided and “conflicted technique” of the camera that Hitchcock elaborates (138). In a flaccid manner, Thoreau lets his line dangle after the boat with the expectation, all the same, that some “mysterious,”

“blundering” creature will eventually cause it to tauten, stretched tight in his hand. Passing the line between surface and depth in this case becomes an erotic activity. But the innuendo involved here of course to some extent concerns the expectation of the cruising reader. Bora suggests that, “Textural narratives are interesting in that how one *feels* matter seems to invite comparisons with how one’s own or someone else’s matter can be shaped” (123). Feeling out Thoreau, in this way, imagining how he may have thrilled at having his line jerked by nature’s “tricks,” as it were, shapes the reading experience in a very specific way. Adding to Bora’s observation, Sedgwick ascertains that, “to perceive texture is always, immediately, and de facto to be immersed in a field of active narrative hypothesizing, testing and re-understanding of how physical properties act and are acted upon over time” (*Touching Feeling* 13). It goes without saying, obviously, that we cannot test the exact texture of the fiber used to make Thoreau’s fishing-line, but neither is the reference more obscure than we are able to understand, in a perhaps new manner, how the physical property of said line was thrilling to Thoreau. The usefulness of the line or rope to survey nature’s depths, then, becomes a tool for reading Thoreau in the instant when we turn it into a trope, which concurrently becomes entangled in the textured affect that the text presents us with. And rather than seeking out the absolute bottom of the text, we should perhaps ask instead what new connections are presented to us in the moment when the dialectic of depth/surface gives way to a transversal of texture. This, I would argue, is the true meaning of the “ecological ethics” that Leo Bersani invokes in the conclusion to “Sociability and Cruising” (62). Cruising for Bersani corresponds to a distinctly impersonally erotic “attunement” to the outside, “one in which the subject, having willed its own lessness, can live less invasively in the world” (62).

VII. The Pond

In a passage from *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, Thoreau notes how “Nature allures inhabitants into all her recesses” (23), and “mystic wildness,” as he puts it in a journal entry, “take[s] captive the eye” (August 19, 1851). The fact that nature’s wildness so aggressively lures the gaze, magnetizing the observer, ensures that turning nature into a trope (itself a name for the process of turning) proves difficult—it cannot easily be made to adorn a mask, and nor can a likeness to any specific human features be determined easily: “Many men have been likened to it [Walden Pond], but few deserve that honor” (*Walden* 240). However, figuring the facelessness of nature is of course already a trope, but this would appear to entail a negative process that cannot result in the usual prosopopeia by which we give face to the nonhuman. As nature does not have a face proper, the I (eye) cannot even conceive of this Other as Other; in other words, this is alterity without any kind of recourse to the human. Walden Pond, as “one of the most ancient scenes stamped on the tablets of [his] memory,” becomes the primary “recess” for Thoreau, as he described it in his journal sometime after August 6, 1845—the most enticing and suggestive spot of unfathomable nature. This “woodland vision,” as the entry further reads, constitutes something like his primary identification with the world—not his mother’s rooms, but the solitude of the pond became his spirit’s “proper nursery.” Perhaps this is why Michael Warner calls him “the unparented bachelor of *Walden*” (“Thoreau’s Bottom” 62). As an adult, the pond proves no less significant for Thoreau. When he imagines himself exchanging glances with “earth’s eye,” the pond, “looking into which the beholder measures the depth of his own nature” (*Walden* 233), becomes a means of identification for Thoreau; but this can only be a partial identification, and “there is no point of view from which [the reader] might perceive all the

parts, let alone the parts' (and the self's) holistic correlation" (Faflik, "Deep Thought, Shallow Aesthetic" 71). As Žižek would put it, no measuring-rod fashioned from human hands would ever be sufficient in measuring something like the depth of the self, and no fixed point from which we can surmise a level of "sameness" with another can then be determined. Instead, Thoreau focuses on fragmented metaphors to complete the image of the pond, which is consequently nowhere near complete at all. For example, he figures the "fluviate trees next the shore" as the "slender eyelashes which fringe it" (*Walden* 233), while the shore itself resembles "lips;" the shore is devoid of growth, however, as "no beard grows" there (229). This confused series of images that at once recalls the pond as eye and mouth thus points to its unfathomable nature; indeed, it appears "bottomless" (237).³⁹ But, at the same time, the pond "impress[es] [Thoreau] like a tarn high up on the side of a mountain, its bottom far above the surface of other lakes" (130), and even its "lowest" point is "high." While the place of the pond, geographically, can of course be determined without problem, it is not localizable in Thoreau's mind as a synecdochal whole, and it is as if its very incompleteness comes to stand in for the mystery of nature, which is again the mystery of self and other. In this sense, the path to Walden, in the full glory of its alterity, becomes, or has always been, "an inaccessible horizon."

The pond is not an object proper; it can only be conceived of by considering the procession of figures that we have identified in relation to it. The pond comes together as a whole only by virtue of its fragmented part-organs. We can here draw upon what David Hillman and Carla Mazzo call "the ontological status of the part," as this characterized early modern culture in Europe (xii). Thoreau similarly elevates the fragmentary nature of the pond, which reveals a number of "tensions between the metaphoric and the metonymic"

³⁹ In "The Pond in Winter" chapter of *Walden*, Thoreau nevertheless assures us that he was able to fathom the pond "easily," and that the "greatest depth was exactly one hundred and two feet" (335).

(Hillman and Mazzo xii). To a Deleuzian it might be tempting to see the pond as a “body without organs,” but this would deprive the pond of its figural complexity. Thoreau elaborates on the early modern “aesthetic of the part,” which does not “demand or rely upon the reintegration of the part into a predetermined whole” (Hillman and Mazzo xiv). As Elizabeth Grosz has shown by way of Henri Bergson, this part-aesthetic requires that “perception, intellectual cognition, and action reduce and refine the object, highlighting and isolating that which in it is of interest or of potential relevance to our future action” (*Time Travels* 135). The world exists as a pure abundance of impressions that we must “cut” away at in order to make sense of anything: “we make or fabricate the world of objects as an activity we undertake by living with and assimilating objects” (136). However, be that as it may, it is clear that “we leave behind something untapped of the fluidity of the world, the movements, vibrations, transformations that occur *below* the threshold of perception and calculation and outside the relevance of our practical concerns” (136). Thoreauvian sauntering is exactly concerned to tap into the “extraintellectual impulses as instincts and intuitions” (136) that constitute the unthought of everyday life, in order to “discern the interconnections [...] between things” in a way that might allow us to “live in the world in excess of our needs, and in excess of the self-presentation or immanence of materiality, to collapse ourselves, as things, back into the world” (136). In order to achieve this, however, Thoreau must create a relational rhetoric, which, through successive figural layers, comes to reveal the textured “thickness” of the world. Consequently, insofar as a thing, according to Grosz, by a process of intellectualization, is the result of the artificial rendering, or “*order[ing]*,” of matter into something the mind is able to apprehend, when we become thing-like, we append ourselves “as a kind of prosthesis to inorganic matter itself, to function as [nature’s] rational supplement” (139). At the same time that nature is then “humanized”

the human is “de-humanized,” and the inversion of animate/inanimate becomes a crucial element of the discussion. Grosz thus makes use of a preposterous figure, in order to show how the reversal of anthropomorphization negates the priority of human agency.

As a remote and hidden place, Walden Pond appears as a “recess,” a word which at Thoreau’s time would have had the added connotation of a secret or private area, and in this case we can add another orifice to the list of metonyms that make up his vision of Walden: the anus. The feminine quality of the word “slender” and the fact that Walden’s “lips” appear smooth do not, however, immediately and clearly indicate to us the gender of the pond. According to Michael Warner, Thoreau usually “equates the pond with a man” (“Thoreau’s Bottom” 72), and I have not encountered anything in his writings to suggest that he thought of Walden in feminine terms. Warner arrives at the rectal connotation of the pond through a sustained examination of “fathoming” as a Thoreauvian metaphor for not just simple “contact with the other” but—as becomes clear by Thoreau’s fascination with a certain woodchopper’s “concealed bottom”—anal penetration, more specifically (72, 73). And since all his comparisons to bottoms are male in scope, it appears sound to suggest that nature’s orifice, as well, should be thought of as male. Thus, “For every passage about the attraction of seeing himself reflected in the water’s surface, there is another passage about the lure of penetrating that surface to the bottom beneath” (72); “touching bottom” with Walden, in a borrowed pun from Bora (123), thus involves surveying and scientific discovery, yes (see *Walden* 335), but certainly also the thrill of homoerotic fantasy. Employing one of Thoreau’s most cherished directional metaphors, we can therefore say that “fronting” bottoms becomes a chief “necessity of life.”⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Thoreau “went to the woods [...] to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life” (*Walden* 135); and, “By the words, *necessary of life*, I mean whatever, of all that man obtains by his own exertions, has been

Without detailing which, Buell “find[s] some of Warner’s inferences improbable” (525, note 2), and the suggestion of Thoreau’s anal desires might initially strike us as “preposterous;” but this term, however, as should be clear by now, is anything but a negative designation to us. The posterior is the other of the anterior, but the trope of the preposterous turns sexual inversion into the figural and erotic prioritization of the rear. The queer turn to the preposterous, as this thesis aims to show in general, delivers us a means by which we can examine the creative and sexual provenance of, for example, Thoreau’s ostensibly enigmatic and contradictory rhetorical figures.

We can here invoke the passage from Guy Hocquenghem’s *Homosexual Desire* that Warner selects as his epigram, in which he states that, “We only see our anus in the mirror of narcissism” (“Thoreau’s Bottom” 53). If it is true, as Merleau-Ponty suggests in “Eye and Mind,” that, in staring into the mirror, “Everything that is most secret about me passes into that face, that flat, closed being of which I was already dimly aware, from having seen my reflection mirrored in water” (129), what would it mean, hence, to see one’s own anus reflected in water—the inversion of the inverted face? The something “otherworldly” that is caught in the realm of reflections, according to Merleau-Ponty (130), would only make the recess of the anus seem that more cavernous and mysterious; indeed, Hocquenghem, the primary connoisseur of male anality in Western thought, has elsewhere maintained that, “the anus remains an intimate and empty site of a mysterious and personal production” (“Family, Capitalism, Anus” 151). The rectum teasingly frustrates by being seemingly depthless—as well as “unfathomable” and a source of “inexhaustible” imaginative wealth as Sedgwick notes in her exploration of Henry James’ use of anality as a trope for narrative structuring (*Tendencies* 100, 103)—but, simultaneously, it figures as the “unspeakability” of

from the first, or from long use has become, so important to human life that few, if any, whether from savageness, or poverty, or philosophy, ever attempt to do without it” (54).

homosexuality as such (75). As a murky mirror, the anus defies reflection. What the anus reveals, if anything, is opposite truth or clarity, as it rather outlines the contours of the abyss, on the periphery of which the pursuer of knowledge inevitably comes to “stare[] into an impenetrable darkness,” whence the Socratic “belief in the fathomability of the nature of things” must perish (Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* 84, 83). In keeping with Nietzschean terms, we can say that the rectum eludes assimilation into a coherent, smooth Apollonian form—it remains craggy and unseemly—and it signals, tropologically, a wound on the body of knowledge, the surfacing of Dionysian rupture; it leads ultimately to what Sedgwick in a different context has called “cognitive frustration” (*Touching Feeling* 24). And it is therefore not surprising that Lee Edelman should assign to the rear-end the following (lack of) designation: “The asshole [...] means nothing more than the nothingness it materializes. Valued at less than zero, it, like the zero’s bounded hole, is consigned to signifying nothing and thus to framing the system of values that refuses to grant it a substantive place” (“*Rear Window’s Glasshole*” 75). The negative value of the anus does not mean, however, that it may not engender connections which might come to *mean* something through a process of association and deferral.

As an epistemological wound, the rectum surely resists cogent signification. However, Thoreau’s “Beautiful Knowledge” is “wild and dusky” (*Excursions* 214), and in his discussion of the degree to which nature should be cultivated for human use that we alluded to earlier, he offers the following: “part [of earth] will be tillage, but the greater part will be meadow and forest, not only serving *an immediate use*, but preparing a mould against *a distant future*, by the annual decay of the vegetation which it supports” (214; my emphasis). Not light, but the accumulation of rank dirt, found “in the impervious and quaking swamps” (204), is what we must depend upon to sustain the human race into the future. This

is why the unfathomable can be judged beautiful, despite the fact that we can neither properly apprehend nor comprehend it as such. Reading the pond as a figure of anality, and thus the impossibility of its becoming incorporated into a mimetic system of signification, then, means that it cannot be considered a site of identification proper. The bottom swallows the surface.

This failure at recognition, nonetheless, forms the threshold through which we can begin to think sexual relations outside the binary of self/other and beyond the issue of narcissism. Warner precisely calls attention to the fact that, “Not all erotic desires must have their source in self/other relations in order for them to be understood as though they do. Thoreau had, for example, an intense erotic investment in hearing that does not require him to thematize any particular relation to others or to a self” (“Thoreau’s Bottom” 67). As Warner is mostly interested in investigating how “the self/other structure of liberal erotics” works in Thoreau (68), however, to him, not surprisingly, “Thoreau’s pleasure in hearing may be an exception that proves the rule” of the pervasiveness of this structure (67). I am, on the other hand, interested in dwelling further on the incomplete anthropomorphization of the pond itself, as this, in a way that Warner does not fully consider, becomes part of the nineteenth-century strategy of representing “the corporeal practices of ‘homo’ sexuality by way of displacement” (72)—i.e., metonymy. By this logic of displacement, we can say that the “lure” of penetrating the surface of the pond is at the same time the lure of inhabiting “that other life,” which Thoreau dared only dream of—a queer (post-human) realm of utopian potential as expressed by his invocation to the “serene friendship-land” (June 14, 1838).

In *Homographesis*, Lee Edelman asserts that, building on Foucault's famous description of the coming into being of the homosexual as species in nineteenth-century medical discourse,

the "homosexual" enters historical view *as a "homosexual"* only through a rhetorical operation that essentializes as a metaphoric designation, a totalized identity, what had been understood before this tropological shift as a contingent aspect of self. The "homosexual," that is acquires a "face" only through the rhetorical redistribution of "meanings" at a specific moment in the history of the West. (196)

As Thoreau was writing prior to the "tropological shift" that Edelman refers to, he is then able to figure the queer as a dis-figured, or pre-figured, whole—stitched together by contingent parts. Metonymy is different from synecdoche, we should here remember, and Thoreau's heavy cathecting of the pond, to use a Freudian term, splits it into a tripartite figure for three different yet related orifices. (Even physically the eye, mouth, and anus are related as all three, albeit in different physiognomic ways, rely on the relaxing and contracting of sphincters to function properly). In "Is the Fundament a Grave?," Jeffrey Masten quotes a passage from Thomas Elyot's 1541 *The Castel of Helth* in which it is said that when matter is passed through the stomach it is "toured in to another fygure" (134). This leads Masten to conclude that "the mouth and the fundament [i.e., anus] are equally salubrious sites of evacuation; like the mouth, the fundament produces health through purgation" (134). This reversal of the excremental function does not appear inappropriate when we consider that, according to Freud, "embryologically the anus corresponds to the primitive mouth, which has migrated down to the end of the bowel" (*SE* 22:100). Moreover, the anus is also the first orifice of the body to take shape *in utero*, and what is typically

conceived of as the “other” of genital masculinity thus, ironically, gains provenance at this early stage of life.

The mouth and the anus of the metonymic series encompassing the pond thus share an intimate connection. In a sense, the pond splits apart under the figural weight of Thoreau’s rhetoric; the displacement of the pond into three different orifices ensures that its incomplete and fragmented state remains as such. This figural splitting destabilizes, or de-prioritizes, the powerful structure of the eye as central metaphor of knowledge in Thoreau,⁴¹ and, in this instant, the pond becomes something more complicated than merely a vehicle for Thoreau’s narcissism. Thoreau’s cultivation of a “relaxed attention” (qtd. in Schneider 113) on his walks, then, becomes a metonym for the relaxation of both the optic and rectal sphincters, quaking or twitching with eagerness in anticipation of receiving the “Titanic features” of nature⁴² in a moment of radical openness. This translates into a relaxation of a purely optic relation to nature. What we can term the preposterous prosopopeia of the pond—the defacement of nature—turns it into a “haptic space,” which Deleuze and Guattari describes as, among other things, “a local space[] of pure connection” (*A Thousand Plateaus* 544). Here things are “twisted,” made to point in “opposite direction[s],” “turned upside down” (545). The promise of ecstasy, in this case, would result in the overwhelming and overpowering—and, hence, not so “subtile”—penetration by nature’s “magnetism” (*Excursions* 195). Moreover, the fluctuation of Walden Pond, with its rise and fall, provides us with a metaphor for the alternating contraction and relaxation of sphincter muscles. That Thoreau’s sauntering

⁴¹ We must here expect that Thoreau, in a certain sense, recognized that his vocation as “poet-seer,” as someone “who [both] sees and understands fully the natural world around him and...into the spiritual world beyond the limitations of most men’s vision” (Schneider 113), was comprised, at the outset by his inability to properly frame nature according to either a figural or positivistic schema.

⁴² Bette Talvacchia has traced the source of “sphincter”—the modern-day denotation of which is not gender specific—to the Latin word *spinthria*, “coarsely denot[ing] a male prostitute” (56). Now, it would undoubtedly be taking things too far were we to suggest that Thoreau should think of himself as nature’s prostitute in this way.

ways, as I will show, take him into “excrementious” territory should therefore not surprise us. David Leverenz suggests that, as a metaphor for his “depression and alienation,” his “excremental language” “implies that he feels like shit” (23), and while it is true that Thoreau suffered many anxieties in his life, the flow of nature’s “gutters” assumes a place proper in his displaced erotics that subtends, so to speak, his curiosity of anal pleasures.

VIII. The Cut

Front-yards are not made to walk in, but, at most, through, and you could go in the back way.

—Thoreau, “Walking”

Cruising nature, for Thoreau, responds to a very specific attention and fascination with different recesses and other “murky” areas of the wilderness surrounding his home in Concord. The connotation of “going *à la sainte terre*” that Thoreau ascribes to sauntering, then, makes of nature a sacred place. The imagined bottomlessness of Walden helps to keep his relation to nature mysterious—the “vast and Titanic features” remain unblemished by human apprehension. Sauntering, for its part, aims at intimacy with natural things, but this initiates a movement beyond standard linguistic description based on conventional apperception. Movement itself, Thoreau suggests, as it refers to the flow of nature, is necessary for thought to appear.

Methinks that the moment my legs begin to move my thoughts begin to flow—as if I had given vent to the stream at the lower end & consequently new fountains flowed into it at the upper. (August 19, 1851)

In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche says that, “It is necessary to *look away* from oneself in order to see *much*” (122). Zarathustra is driven “to see the ground and background of all things” (122), and like Thoreauvian virtue, knowledge “needs to be viewed both before and behind” (October 25, 1840). Unlike Zarathustra, however, who attempts to “climb over [himself] – up, upward,” ever upward, until even the stars are beneath his feet (122), in order to reach the “*ultimate peak*” (122), Thoreau seems to think, rather, that for truth to appear, one “need[s] to increase the draught below” (August 19, 1851). Then, on the next page he inserts, almost randomly, a metaphor of barrenness: “The grass in the high pastures is almost as dry as hay.” In this extended passage—itsself carried on by the flow of metaphors—it becomes clear that the fertility of thought depends on that which comes, or flows, from below.

Like eighteenth-century scatological writers in England, who embraced filth as an anti-urban and anti-urbane mode of expression (see Smith, *Between Two Stools* 228), Thoreau’s scatological imperative can be seen to express something similar. He represents the village, with its “dirty institutions” (*Walden* 218), as a digestive system that, figurally, turns him into a piece of excrement. Having made an “irruption” into some house, he is “let out through the rear avenues, and so escaped to the woods again” (215). Paradoxically, his refuge in the woods is then described using words such as “snug” and “tight” (215), which do not immediately signal openness and freedom, but rather reminds us of the cavernous, sphincter-like figures that we have identified elsewhere in his writing. The thick texture of night provides him much pleasure, however, and in a journal entry dated 5 August, 1851, he paints a picture of titillating confinement: “As the twilight deepens [...] my walls contract.” This is a parody of Emerson’s transparent eyeball, which here, by the diminished “silvery light” of the moon, relaxes into a less reverent, yet related, figure, which compliments the

“elasticity” of thought during the day (*Walden* 134). At sunset, he writes on January 8, 1854, “I invert[] my head.” This remarkable figure turns the rectitude of the human upside down, and walking at night comes to constitute one of Thoreau’s most directly preposterous moments. This “contracting” turn may be read as the “qualified freedom” of romance, but as David Faflík focuses on Thoreau’s “conditional limits on perception” (“Deep Thought, Shallow Aesthetic” 71) he ignores the erotic impetus of the dialectical movement between depth/surface and loose/tight at play in Thoreau’s rhetorical system, in which the contractions of night reach a peak at morning when, “tied to the mast like Ulysses,” he “sail[s]” into the day with “unrelaxed nerves” (*Walden* 141).

On this count, I believe it is fair to identify a modern ancestor to Thoreau: Georges Bataille—the modernist philosopher and connoisseur of all things “vile.” Given Bataille’s propensity for highly visceral descriptions of the functions of the body and excess of all kinds and Thoreau’s documented squeamishness for direct expressions of the sensual aspects of life, it would appear somewhat preposterous to compare the two—an odd pairing indeed. But it is namely by focusing on the preposterous (as I have theorized it so far) elements, or propensities, of both that we can make sense of this pairing. Thoreau’s championing of the “draught below” and the “subtile magnetism” of the earth humming beneath our feet, like “a common surge of life” (Wilson, *Romantic Turbulence* 21)—no thought could exist without this presence of what is base—corresponds to the following sentiment in Bataille’s short treatise on the big toe, that most “ignoble” part of the human body:

Although within the body blood flows in equal quantities from high to low and from low to high, there is a bias in favor of that which elevates itself, and human life is erroneously seen as an elevation. (*Visions of Excess* 20)

He then goes on to deconstruct the naïve and faulty “division of the universe into subterranean hell and perfectly pure heaven” (20). The big toe is the linchpin, if you will, of Bataille’s deconstruction, or, in fact, it is what makes the division of hell and heaven impossible in the first place, as it is what reminds us of our connection to the “terrestrial mud” that we try in vain to distance ourselves from (22). We can connect this sentiment to Patricia Parker’s reading of Shakespeare’s *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, in which she identifies how the “rhetorical foot fetish” of the otherwise elevated Armado “joins his abasement to her [Jaquenetta’s] ‘shoe,’ in lines that recall the familiar linking of this female ‘low matter’ with the ‘shoe’ with the ‘hole’ in it, woman as Eve-descended ‘weaker vessel’ and ‘worser sole’” (“Preposterous Reversals” 442). A preoccupation with toes, feet, and their various adornments thus carries with it a cultural and historical connotation of gender inversion. Here we should remember that, as Eric Wilson suggests, it is by “gazing at unadorned mud” that Thoreau forms his understanding of “the primal form of life” (*Romantic Turbulence* 25). The eye, then, traditionally considered the noblest organ—“the furthest from the earth, from the base, the sordid, the sex organs” (Kofman, *Nietzsche and Metaphor* 105)—is now brought down to the level of “unadorned mud,” which traditionally has been seen as the dwelling of the sodomite, “having sunk into a filthy and bestial nature associated with dirt, mire, offal, and animality” (McFarlane 39). But the “high,” or “titanic,” features of nature are not devaluated by the introduction of “low,” or “muddy,” matter; instead, they appear to enhance them. The traditional decorum of the “civilizing process,” distinguishing “‘high’ from (social and bodily) ‘low’” (Parker, “Preposterous Reversals” 438), in this way, is disordered and deflated in Thoreau. As such, Thoreau does little to distance himself from the base elements of life, or what Emerson had condemned in *Nature* as “disagreeable” to one’s constitution— “[t]he sordor and filths of nature” (1:45). Thoreau’s fascination with the “lower end” of

nature can be linked with what he calls the “intensity of life:” “As for completeness and roundness, to be sure, we are each like one of the laciniae of a lichen, a torn fragment [...] .We want not completeness but intensity of life” (May 24, 1857). If we should indeed think of ourselves as resembling “the laciniae of lichen,” we are then fragments of what, according to the etymology of “lichen,” is “in all the senses below” (*OED*).

In his arguably heavy-handed Freudian reading of Thoreau, Raymond D. Gozzi takes note of his scatological interests: “he had an interest year after year in sand and clay banks having an excrementitious appearance” (*Thoreau’s Psychology* 6). We find at least preliminary proof of this in a journal entry from the spring of 1848, where Thoreau praises the “infinite variety of forms” that “thawing clay and sand” can assume; for example, “It [the clay] begins to flow & immediately it takes the forms of vines [...]—or of the human brain or lungs or bowels.”⁴³ In *Walden* he expands the more aphoristic musings on clay from the journal to include clearer allusions to feces, and, in a fairly abashed manner, he admits that, “True,” all this talk of clay “is somewhat excrementitious” (*Walden* 356); yet, this does not stop him from adding to the sentence from the journal entry above that he adapted to the text of *Walden*, “...and excrements of all kinds” (353). At other points, however, he reserves the more overtly fecal descriptions for his journal.⁴⁴ His “delight” in walking through “the deep cut” next to the railroad that the “thawing clay and sand” flow down also betrays a fascination with the figural import of scatological forms. As Richard Bridgman notes, this “[c]ut enchanted him, and no more so than when it flowed” (143).⁴⁵

⁴³ The entries from spring 1848 of Thoreau’s *Journal* do not have specific dates attached to them; the passage that I have just quoted from appear on page 382, volume 2 of the Princeton edition.

⁴⁴ Regarding the “Deep Cut,” Richard Bridgman notes that, in the manuscript of *Walden*, “Some of the revealing emotional and imagistic force of the original journal entries was suppressed” (143).

⁴⁵ Thoreau’s fascination with the Deep Cut “created by the Fitchburg Railroad project” (Bridgman 142) and its scatological suggestion is only one instance of Thoreau’s complex relationship to feces and bowels. Bridgman quotes Thoreau’s description of the excessive attempts at intimacy of the pair of “too familiar” clergymen who stayed at the Thoreaus in June 1853 in the following way: “It was difficult to keep clear of his [one of the

For Gozzi, this substantiates his diagnosis of Thoreau as an obsessive neurotic. His attitude is typical of American Freudians in general, as non-normative sexual inclinations must necessarily be attributable to “libidinal regression,” or the failure to arrive at “adult sexual activity” (6, 8).⁴⁶ But if Thoreau’s fascination with mud translates into an investment in anality—what we can link to, with reference to Wilson, “the troubling flows of the earth” (*Romantic Turbulence* 26)—why is it that “swamps appear to have been a feminine symbol [i.e., vaginal] to him”? (Gozzi 9). Gozzi does not provide any evidence for this, and, we might ask, are sand and clay not to be found in swamp or bog areas? Gozzi’s figural separation of swamp/vaginal orifice and mud/excrement is messy at best. In fact, Michael West provides us with enough corroboration to suggest that swamps for Thoreau carried both fecal and anal connotations.⁴⁷ And that in the expanded passage from *Walden* the Cut should remind of a “cave [...] laid open to the light” (353) certainly shares a figural affinity with the anus post-defecation (or pre-penetration).⁴⁸ That swamps in the first place should remind Gozzi of the vaginal orifice can in fact be said to be preposterous, in a strictly Freudian optic, since, as Jerome Neu points out, “in the course of ‘normal sexual development’ there is an equation of anus and vagina (that is, heterosexual intercourse involves displaced anal eroticism), so homosexuals who prefer sodomy may in some sense be more direct” (189); in

clergymen] slimy benignity, with which he sought to cover you before he swallowed you and took you fairly into his bowels” (142). Registering the very visceral nature of the disgust he feels in the clergymen’s presence, Bridgman thus suggests that Thoreau’s positive interest in bowels was figurative and imaginative rather than actually physical. What Michael West calls Thoreau’s “zealous cleanliness” (1050) would substantiate this claim.

⁴⁶ In Henry Abelove’s brief summary of American psychoanalysts’ position on homosexuality, Charles Socarides, writing in the 1960s, stands out as the most aggressive proponent of the view that homosexuality is “a severe illness, accompanied often by such psychotic manifestations as schizophrenia” (18).

⁴⁷ West reminds us of “the obscene meaning of the verb bog common in the nineteenth century” (1050) that Thoreau relies on to depict the meanness and sordid circumstances of his “allegorical John Farmer,” the Irishman, John Field (1049). “To bog” in this context is equal to “exonerating the bowels” (*OED*).

⁴⁸ Since at least Shakespeare’s time, “cut” has been used as (abusive) slang for “vagina.” In *Twelfth Night*, the servant Malvolio, identifying a letter from his lady, notes that “this is my lady’s hand. These be her very c’s, her u’s, and her t’s, and thus makes her great P’s” (Act 2, Scene 5, ll. 84-86); see Susanna Moore’s novel *In the Cut* for a contemporary example. In Thoreau’s usage, however, “cut” is at best ambiguous, and, based on textual evidence, I have been suggesting that we view it in anal terms. The reversal, or confusion, of anus and vagina is of course one of the most common ways in which the preposterous occurs in sodomitical discourse.

this case, therefore, “it is heterosexuality that is the earlier phase” (189; Neu’s account cannot decide if it wants to turn its back on the homophobic bent of Freudian criticism entirely, as his mention of “sodomy” may imply).

A case for reading the Cut according to anal penetration presents itself in a passage from the *Journal*, noticeably absent from the text of *Walden*, when Thoreau describes how a “reddish tinge” has appeared in the mud (see Bridgman 143);⁴⁹ elsewhere, Thoreau further evinces his fondness of the color red: “We love to see any redness in the vegetation of the temperate zone. It is the color of colors” (*Excursions* 227). Might the metaphorical “mines of secret [that] are constantly opening in [him]” (February 9, 1841) not also include the actual physical sensations and processes that attenuate the stretching of the anus, accompanied as it might be by tiny tears in the outside texture of the orifice? His attention to especially the flow of the Cut would connote, in this case, the *jouissance* of passing liquid matter through the anus—diarrhea or blood. And his excitement is thus “susceptible to yielding both to associations of the passing of excrement and to fantasies of wounding” (Bridgman 143). If passing the fishing-line into Walden can be seen as an allegory of “light” anal penetration, considering the insubstantial density and width of the line, the image of reddish, rushing clay would indicate a more dramatic and violent situation. We are far from the foreplay-like teasing of “the stealthy-paced water” here (*October 18, 1840*). Something in nature has broken; “something violent had been done to nature [turned inside out]” (Bridgman 145). But in order to experience the “intensity of life,” as we have seen, one must embrace wounding or fragmentation, and so it appears natural that Thoreau should take great pains to craft this passage about earth’s “crack.” If finally he appears to lose his nerve somewhat—this explains

⁴⁹ In his *Dictionary of Literary Symbols*, we should at the same note that, as Michael Ferber informs us, “red,” according to the root sense of Hebrew *adamah*, can be linked to (and has been by Blake in *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*) to the revival of life (see entry on “Clay” 43).

the hackneyed and safely transcendental image of the “fluttering butterfly”—the “unimaginable liquefaction” (Bridgman 146) of the self is highly desirable, not least of all because it calls attention to a central motto of *Walden*: “We need to witness our own limits transgressed, and some life pasturing freely where we never wander” (*Walden* 366)—or flowing freely, we should add.

Thoreau’s propensity for “bog-dwelling” thus liberates him from what Bataille calls the “automatic rectitude” of human development (*Visions of Excess* 87), which includes conformity to “the production of social order and precedence” (Parker, “Preposterous Events” 189). It is telling that freedom from the human order of things is represented by excremental habitation. Surely, as Bataille posits in *Erotism*, would excrement “stink if we had not thought it was disgusting in the first place?” (58). Put differently, what we find disgusting does not necessarily come about due to an innate estimation, but is rather the product of a social conditioning that, like “a contagion,” is “passed down to us from the earliest men through countless generations of scolded children” (58). This “social conditioning” is related to part of what Jonathan Goldberg’s term “sodometry” implies, since, as we will remember from the introduction, it carries the weight of a judgment, “affirming an identity on the basis of acts, legitimizing an act in one situation that it stigmatizes in another” (*Sodometries* 25).

That Bridgman ultimately deems Thoreau’s “descriptive comparisons” to feces and anal cuts “unattractive” (144), to my mind, is indicative of another form of “social conditioning” which is apt to conclude that scatology and anal eroticism are unseemly—at the very least it would be (negatively) preposterous, Bridgman intimates, to suggest that images of fecal matter can be linked to “the positive aspects of spring” (145). Regardless, Thoreau is of a different mind. In a poem dedicated to thawing nature he delineates his desire

to stretch out on “the hig[h]way side” (l. 3) overlooking the cut, where he would like to “thaw and trickle with the melting snow” (l. 4)—mixing his own fluids with nature’s “tears of joy” (l. 2), which, metonymically, could just as well signify other forms of liquid. Again we see how Thoreau is deliberately confusing orifices, as his own “tears of joy” would be streaming from the urinary tract, rather than from his eyes; nature’s joy, in any case, is bound to Thoreau’s own delight in excretion, and the liberating vision of life that follows. When it came to “bathing boys” Thoreau had to settle for the role of voyeur (Fone, *Road* 48), but in nature he can become a active participant in, or imitator of, at least, nature’s processes. The streaming clay as principal metaphor for the coming of spring in *Walden* that we saw above is followed pages later with an invocation to spring as “the realization of the Golden Age” (*Walden* 362). The Arcadia, inhabited solely by men according to myth, having hitherto seemed far off is now closer to being realized, standing in a great pool of shit, and the stench, we might imagine is exactly what generates those “golden memories” of ancient Greece. From surveying bottoms top-down to finding himself “bogged down” in muddy recesses, Thoreau displays what we with reference to modern sexual parlance might call his “versatile” position in relation to nature. Hence, throughout his corpus of texts, he appears to vacillate between passive and active constitutions in his ruminations on nature. At the same time, he displays a disregard for what since the time of Shakespeare has been known as the law of restraint, which is “threatened by the incontinence or breaching associated with the (moral as well as bodily) ‘fault’ [fissure] of women [as] contrasted to male self-enclosure and bodily *integritas*” (Parker, “Preposterous Reversals” 440).

What Bridgman judges to be “dubious imaginative exercises” (145), I thus consider the expression of Thoreau’s desire to be free from “the human order of things”⁵⁰—understood as the policing of both bodily and emotional boundaries according to gender and sexuality. In fact, are Thoreau’s sustained elaborations on clay not merely expressive of his desire to rediscover the primitive origins of humankind? Since biblical times, clay has been a symbol of human flesh, and the seemingly contradictory nature of Thoreau’s rhetorical exercises and wordplay might be not only “fundamentally liberating” (West 1057)—we should here also keep in mind the early modern meaning of “fundament” as anus (see Masten, “Is the Fundament a Grave?”)—but part of his aim to access the primal elements of existence, for which he would have to visit the swamp and bog areas of the forest.

As has already been alluded to, Thoreau cherished swamp and bog areas, and rather than simply “feigning descent to the swamp,” like “that supremely contented hawk who appears soaring over the marsh at the end of *Walden*” (West 1057), he submerged himself fully in the mire in an effort to live out his vision of a “holy” day. “Wading in bogholes to contemplate its lurid berries,” West points out by quoting from the *Journal*, elicits in Thoreau “a ‘certain excitement’,” which is, “like the Baudelairean *frisson* of evil, the esthete’s ultimate sensation” (1060-1). Such “lurid berries” “dazzle” him, and the “quaking sphagnum [a kind of bog-moss]” they stand in texturally supplements his delight of the “impenetrable

⁵⁰ In fact, by an allusion to the biblical prophet Zechariah, it is possible to suggest that “filth” accompanies or precedes divine charge. In Zechariah 3:3 we are told that Joshua, the high priest, is “dressed in filthy clothes as he [stands] before the angel [of God]” awaiting His command. As at the outset of life, then, being “born” into one’s prophetic vocation invokes the following famous homily: *inter faeces (et urinam) nascimur*. According to this reading, the passage from shit to butterfly in the “Spring” chapter of *Walden* comes to seem much less “contradictory,” as Bridgman otherwise has it (145). Further, in the study, *Scatalogic Rites of All Nations*, John G. Bourke relates how some tribal groups would adorn themselves with human excrement as a sign of mourning (176). In this way, we might consider Thoreau’s allusions to feces as part of a mourning ritual—for the inevitable loss built into nature, even as it leads to new sensations of joy in springtime, but perhaps also in relation to his own personal feelings of dismay. Indeed, Thoreau, in Warner’s estimation, viewed purity and impurity as “coeval” in nature (“*Walden’s Erotic Economy*” 164).

and unfathomable” bog (*Excursions* 204). His delight of swamps could then effectively be connected to what Bridgman sees as his propensity for metaphors “of a gravity-dominated diffusion [or confusion]” (145), as concerns the Cut. His use of the word “quake” to describe the moss affords us an opportunity to connect this description with that of his late-night fishing expedition quoted earlier in this chapter. As a textured “*frisson*” word, “quake” can be grouped with “to jerk,” but whereas the latter is indicative of a sudden, violent movement that we experience as a tightening sensation, “quake,” in how Thoreau employs it, suggests to us that the swamp is subject to a certain, pulsing sort of rhythm. That the moss is seen to quake appears to be a hyperbolic way of suggesting that the impulse of nature influences the being and surface of all things. He rightly refers to what we might term the banal sublimity of the pond “as a sacred place” (*Excursions* 205). Ironically, the swamp, which seems “dismal” to the “citizen” (205), affords a refuge from “the mud and slush of opinion” (Bridgman 142). The tenor of this metaphor, when literalized, becomes the vehicle for an exactly opposite sentiment.

IX. Conclusion: There Can Be No Textual Relation(?)

We usually consider masturbation as an “imaginary sexual act,” i.e., an act where the bodily contact with a partner is only imagined; is it not possible to reverse the terms and to conceive the “proper” sexual act, the act with an “actual” partner, as a kind of “masturbation with a real (instead of only imagined) partner”?

—Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative*

You’re dreaming of taking on a braid or a weave, a warp or a woof, but without being sure of the textile to come, if there is one, if any remains and without knowing if what remains to come will still deserve the name of text, especially of the text in the figure of a textile.

—Jacques Derrida, *Veils*

In my discussion of D. A. Miller's anachronizing courtship of Roland Barthes, I noted that any "shaping" of literary figures we attempt is essentially masturbatory. As the sexual act with a virtual partner (the dead or alive writer) is of course impossible to consummate in any kind of "real" way, this must be considered a form of masturbation, even as one's libidinal impulse has located an object, ostensibly, outside and distinct from the ego. Reading, whether as cruising or not, is heavily narcissistic. In fact, reading appears to oscillate between options (a) and (c) on Freud's chart of narcissistic object-choice—choosing either: (a) "What he [sic] is himself (actually himself);" or, (c) "What he would like to be" (*SE* 4:47). Cruising texts might then be expressive of the hunt for a lost ideal (or a sense of gratification located in early childhood), the possible attainment of which is what propels our reading. Needless to say, the fantasy-object of our reading (as projected onto the writer) remains illusive, our gratification deferred, and our desire asymptotic. In a word, drawing on Merleau-Ponty's terminology that we encountered earlier, the object of desire is a "de-formed" object; but only, naturally, since it does not appear wholly there for us. As Thoreau puts it, "There is a character in every one which no art [or reading] can reach to beautify or deform" (July 10, 1840). This suspended relationship between subject and object that reading seems to identify in such a legible way lends the entire endeavor a somewhat masochistic (and masturbatory) air—the suspensions and interruptions that J. Hillis Miller confronts in *Ariadne's Thread* speak to the specific joys of the reader who delights in how certain texts tease us with their inconclusive plots or contradictory rhetorical devices. This is furthermore how the ethics of cruising comes to intersect with the Thoreauvian tension between concealment/disclosure and cultivation/deferment.

Asked by the editors of *After Sex?*—a collection of essays engaging with the precarious status of queer theory (and theory in general) in academe today—to consider the extent to which we find ourselves in a “postsexual moment” (45), Joseph Litvak asserts that what continues to “interest” him about queer theory “has always had an ‘after sex’ dimension, where ‘after’ indicates not just temporal posteriority but also *the pathos of pursuit* [...] and where the pursuit, even more poignantly, bespeaks a condition of excludedness, of secondariness, of envy” resulting in “a frisson of delight” (46; my emphasis). “[As] a science more melancholy than gay,” queer theory, according to Litvak, emphasizes the negative feelings involved in the pursuit, and we are reminded of the “delicate but inaccessible and enigmatic” nature of a boy that Barthes is particularly taken with, as we are told in his cruising diary, of which he can finally know nothing of real substance (*Incidents* 172). The particular “pathos” of cruising denotes a sense in which we always arrive too late—the proleptic sentiment that, no matter the route we choose, our object of desire will always just have left. As Rilke nearly despairingly wonders in “You, Never-arriving One:” “Why go on / trying to recognize you in each moment’s / surge of arrival?” (ll. 3-5). We never discover exactly what we set out to—which is of course also part of the thrill. The affect that the encounter (when it comes) solicits in the cruising subject is never certain to be acknowledged or shared by the object of one’s cruising, whether in the guise of personified nature or coy Parisian boy.

A narcissistic masochist! This would appear to characterize the kind of reader we have been describing so far. But before we make of reading something exceedingly “pathological,” perhaps a different facet of reading that I have touched on in this chapter can help us nuance our finding. We have been interested in different models of reader/writer interaction that finally were grouped with that of cruising, which has come to figure as the

central hysteron proteron of this chapter, in that it has impelled a number of reversals and encounters to set us down unexpected paths. Several times the issue of texture demanded our attention. Like Thoreau's fishing line, the texture of his words affect us, and, if not forming a perfect mediation, the tactile connotations that such words conjure to the mind could be seen to form a trans-historical bond with the one who penned them. By paying careful attention to so-called texture-words we might then conceive of an interactive form of reading that, at the same time, circumvents the danger of anachronism, as texture, in the context of literature at least, is concerned with etymology and the universality of touch. In this case, a historicist inquiry of production methods in mid-nineteenth-century New England in order, for example, to determine the kind of flax-line Thoreau would have used for fishing (imagine if we could pass through our hands an object of similar material while reading Thoreau's fishing passage) would surely prove fruitful. Conceived of in this manner, we might even be able to imagine the kind of "jerk" Thoreau felt on his excursion on the pond in a much more "real" way. The content of the text leads us to explore texture in the physical world and, in turn, connect these back to the reading experience. The radical otherness of the text—the alien presence of that "something more" which refuses signification—impels us back towards the physical, in other words. Cruising queer texts for certain etymologies and innuendos makes the world *feel* differently as a result.

An attention to texture is what finally allows a sense of continuity between past and present. In his journal, Thoreau refers to the "concealed wildness" of things, by which, for example, the "slender," "serrated" leaf "connects itself with the wilder oaks" (September 25, 1859). Holding a "white pine needle" in his hand, he is able to perceive how "each of its three edges is notched or serrated with minute forward-pointing bristles," and it is this desire of nature to always "avoid an unbroken line" (September 25, 1859) that forms the basis of

connection between plants and leaves, as well as people: “My prickles or smoothness are as much a quality of your hand as myself” (February 26, 1841). Limbs as well as other bodily qualities are confused due to nature’s aversion to linearity, and Thoreau’s “preposterousness”—in the various forms it has assumed in this chapter—should thus be seen as entirely “natural.”

Chapter 2: Architecture and the Queer Stylistics of Herman Melville

I. Introduction: Of Symmetry and Ambiguity

*When the Spine is strait, well set, and finely turned, it makes a handsome Body ;
and when it is crooked and ill turned, the Body is deformed.*

—Nicolas Andry de Bois-Regard, *Orthopaedia*

In the previous chapter, Thoreau's valuation of bogs and other, low parts of nature encouraged our preposterous reading. In this chapter, I will expand upon the theme of vertical inversion, high to low, in order to outline the queer architecture of Melville's *oeuvre*. Thoreau had an affinity for snug and contracted places, and this translated into a sparse theory of architecture; he imbued what William Alexander McClung has called the "Senecan synthesis of restraint and release" (129). In *Walden*, he describes the dimensions of the cabin he built at Walden Pond: "I have thus a tight shingled and plastered house, ten feet wide by fifteen long, and eight-feet posts, with a garret and a closet, a large window on each side, two trap doors, one door at the end, and a brick fireplace opposite" (91). According to Thoreau, the inhabitant must see to the construction of his own house, in order that it perfectly represents his spirit; "architectural beauty," thus, can only "grow from within outward, out of the necessities and character of the indweller" (90). Any kind of ornamentation, Thoreau suggests, obscures the soul of the house—impedes the unity between interior and exterior—

turning it into an “architecture of the grave” (91). The mastodon-like chimney of Melville’s short story “I and My Chimney” might well have seemed obscene to Thoreau; its pyramidal shape in fact alludes to its figural tomb-like function within the house. Metaphorically, the chimney grows out of the frustration and thwarted desire of the narrator, but the foundation of the chimney, at the same time, becomes the site of queer pleasures that refuse to be buried beneath the oppressive ideal of normative domesticity.

In his work, Melville often equated symmetry with beauty and a harmonious soul, and asymmetry with base qualities. In the beginning of *Billy Budd*, the archetype of the “Handsome Sailor,” we are told, is a young man whose “moral nature [is] seldom out of keeping with [his] physical make” (280).⁵¹ An African sailor that the narrator had espied in Liverpool many years previous appeared to the narrator as “a symmetric figure much above the average height” (279). The splendor of “the displayed ebony of his chest” (279) must have been “toned” by his splendid “moral nature” (280). Appearance and essence are conflated in this way. Beautiful Billy Budd himself—“a fine specimen of the *genus homo*, who in the nude might have posed for a statue” (327)—is of “unconventional rectitude” (287). Here Melville rehearses a belief common to nineteenth-century aesthetics. According to the foremost American architect of the nineteenth century, Andrew Jackson Downing, “no object can be perfectly beautiful” without the presence of symmetry—“that balance of *opposite parts* necessary to form an agreeable whole” (14, 12). This view echoes Hegel, who

⁵¹ I use the Oxford edition, edited by Robert Milder.

in his *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics* states that, “*Defectiveness of form* arises from *defectiveness of content*” (80). A crooked spine, therefore, connotes a warped personality.

Melville was in fact obsessed with vertical formations. The spine became for him a foremost motif in this regard, as the health of the spine can be directly linked to the health of the soul. As Ishmael says in *Moby-Dick*, “A thin joist of a spine never yet upheld a full and noble soul. I rejoice in my spine, as in the firm audacious staff of that flag which I fling half out to the world” (6:349).⁵² Initially, Melville states the belief that the rectitude of the soul can be discerned in the corresponding linearity or symmetry of the body; however, he turns swiftly to mock this sentiment by using the image of a flag at “half-mast”⁵³—the implication being that his character is one of limited potency. This might then also give us a view into how Melville interpreted his own frequent bouts of crippling back-pain. Limp or firm, Ishmael would always rather “feel your spine than your skull” (6:349), since the spine offers a privileged gateway to different strata of being. For cetaceans and humans alike, the spine would become a means by which to judge the specimen in its entirety, if not from head to toe in the one species, then from head to tail in the other. Like the “beaked prow” of a canoe (6:349), the spine runs from head to rear. Indeed, the French physician, Nicolas Andry de Bois-Regard, in his tract from 1743, *Orthopaedia*, compares the spine to the keel of a ship, “to which the Ribs, the Poop, the Prow, and all the different Parts of the Vessel are joined” (78). The straightness of the spine ensures and preserves the symmetry of the body, if not the soul.

Generally speaking, in Melville’s world ambiguity equals defectiveness. But what of Melville’s own ambiguities? Ambiguity of form or content—really, the ambiguity of either

⁵² All references to Melville’s work are to the Northwestern-Newberry edition unless otherwise noted.

⁵³ Tyrus Hillway has shown that Melville in his articles for the *Yankee Doodle* magazine in 1847 “made satirical use of phrenological terminology” (146), which he had acquired from reading Johann Kaspar Lavater, the Swiss physiognomist.

would be sure to corrupt the integrity of the other: they function as an ideal unity or not at all—leads us into the “deadly space between” “a normal nature” and “natural depravity” (*Billy Budd* 308, 309). Ambiguity disrupts the binary certainty of symmetry, but ambiguity is also what turns the axis of many a Melville story, and his fascination with the “hidden nature” (310) of the “secret forms” (312) that a depraved nature might produce can be ascertained in the rhetorical modes of his texts. In fact, Barbara Johnson has demonstrated how the defective, not to say “perverse” nature of the master-at-arms in *Billy Budd*, John Claggart, is crossed with that of Billy’s innocence, and even as Melville constructs “an opposition between good and evil,” he does so “only to make each term take on the properties of its opposite;” the plot is thus set up “in the form of chiasmus” (571-72). As Johnson puts it, “the real opposition with which Melville is preoccupied here is less the static opposition between good and evil than the dynamic opposition between a man’s ‘nature’ and his acts” (572). This is to say that there is no inherent, direct corollary between form and content, despite what Melville’s earlier texts sometimes claim.

Melville would frequently have antithesis masquerade as synthesis, as in the poem “The Parthenon,” which is constructed as an elaborate apostrophe to the Athenian temple. The second stanza opens with the lines, “Like Lais, fairest of her kind, / In subtlety your form’s defined.” This comparison, seemingly straightforward, raises a question for Lyon Evans: “[W]hy,” he asks, “does Melville honor Lais, a prostitute and priestess of Venus in notoriously corrupt Corinth” (121)? This appears puzzling, when, “In the ancient world, Helen of Troy, not Lais was held to be the most beautiful of women” (121). There is nothing “subtle” about Lais, as it were. And contrary to Vicki Halper Litman’s claim, the temple fails to become a “suitable” “model of aesthetic perfection;” it does not have a proper relationship to “‘form,’ ‘symmetry,’ ‘site’ (or appropriateness of time and place) and ‘reverence for the

archetype” (636). Often “opposing the ideals of restraint and harmony characteristic of Classicism” in his writings, it is ironic that, as Maryhelen C. Harmon notes, Melville should so “yearn to visit classical Rome” (110). In the end, ambiguity proves no less “magnetic” than symmetry for Melville; or, we might say that ambiguity de-magnetizes the symmetrical force of narrative in his prose fiction. As Harmon hints at, the ambiguity of *Billy Budd* was born from “the tension between the ideality and reality of his [Melville’s] 1857 visit to Rome” (118). Even in the earlier “I and My Chimney,” a story that centers on a great symmetrical structure, the possibility of a hidden compartment within the edified chimney takes on a sacred signification for the narrator, and the initial content of the chimney’s meaning is in turn destabilized. Further, the reader’s sympathies quickly come to lie with the sciatica-ridden narrator rather than his rigidly composed wife, whose inflexible posture—she is “straight as a pine” (9:360)—rather signifies her resolve to tear down the narrator’s beloved chimney. The defectiveness of the narrator’s physical form combined with the disputed content of the chimney creates a central ambiguity in the story; the prose is vertically “challenged,” so to speak, which in turn influences the forward-moving motion of the plot. And, as is so often the case in Melville’s stories, “The relation between structure and inhabitant is ironic rather than congruent” (Litman 633).⁵⁴ The Hegelian contiguity between form and content, as will be shown, thus breaks down, and it is this initial rupture that furthermore initiates a preposterous reading of “I and My Chimney,” as the phallic connotation of the chimney is disordered by the signification that the narrator introduces at the “fundamental” level of the structure.

⁵⁴ Timothy Dow Adams shows how Melville, by subverting the idea that there could ever be one-to-one correspondence between form and essence, thus draws on and ironizes the biological analogy in order “to support his theme of misperception” (266-67). As a consequence, “Melville creates a pattern of architectural images based on the biological analogy to undercut the current architectural theories of his time” (266).

Consequently, the initial oppositions between symmetry/asymmetry and beauty/amorality that were identified in Melville's authorship must be reconsidered. The brief example from "I and My Chimney" has made it clear that it is indeed "often difficult to distinguish ambivalence from strategy" in Melville (Otter 166). In this chapter, I will namely focus on "I and My Chimney" in order to point to a general preoccupation in Melville's *oeuvre* with rhetorical figures that twist and turn otherwise stable binaries, such as straight and crooked, masculine and effeminate, natural and depraved. My close-reading of this short story will then allow us to connect the curious spatial metonym of the chimney to other deviant structures in Melville's work: the naturally demonic mountain of Narborough in "The Encantadas," and the man-made but equally un-holy edifice in "The Bell-Tower." Melville's endless parodies and preposterous reversals aim at something more than a mere "play" of the signifier. The excesses of Melville's style are the result of his straining toward "truthfulness," and the instability of his tropological system signifies his inability to achieve this. The architecture of his prose resembles less the rectitude of a healthy spine and more so the misaligned vertebrae of a patient suffering from sciatica—the "nerve-endings" of his language are consequently made to travel by awkward, twisted byways.

Important to my argument will be to point out the ways in which the asymmetrical force of Melville's writing intersects with the "geometrical" peculiarities of queer theory; in turn, I will show how Melville comes to anticipate contemporary theorizing concerning the notion of queer space. Here the reader should keep in mind the etymology of queer, which, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick tells us, "comes from the Indo-European root *-twerkw*, which also yields the German *quer* (transverse), Latin *torquere* (to twist), English *athwart*" (*Tendencies* viii). The history of the word itself becomes a metaphor for a central asymmetrical relation in modern society "between, on the one hand, the relatively continuous relation of female

homosocial and homosexual bonds, and, on the other hand, the radically discontinuous relation of male homosocial and homosexual bonds” (Sedgwick, *Between Men* 4-5). In the end, as we shall see, the entire Melvillean drama of inversion draws us into the vortex of the “deadly space between”—between comprehension and sensation. In the same way that it remains unclear whether Billy’s “cynosure” pulls us, magnetically, towards a peaceful state aboard the *Bellipotent* or if his beauteous form might instead re-invigorate the “promise of armed insurrection” (Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* 93), the vortex-like pull of this space or gap does not resolve the ambiguity. The threat of the homosexual to “twist” apart societal bonds in Melville is simultaneously the promise of rhetorical inversion.

The link that the etymology of queer creates between spatial and rhetorical manipulation prompts me to read Melville’s inverted, or rather “preposterous,” spaces through a critical lens that is informed by recent forays into defining a queer theory of architecture. Queer architecture is something of a misnomer, if not an oxymoron, as it does not construct as much as appropriate a space in-between that which is already built (Betsky 8). Aaron Betsky defines this space in terms of the “misuse or deformation of a place, an appropriation of the buildings and codes of the city for perverse purposes” (5). We can link Betsky’s queer space to Elizabeth Grosz’ estimation of architecture as a “virtual” science. In *Architecture from the Outside*, she writes: “Architecture [...] is perpetually verging on, irresistibly drawn to, its own virtualities, to the ever-increasing loops of uncertainty and immanence that its own practices engage and produce” (113). The future of architecture as a discipline therefore depends on a “reconsideration of the virtual and the promise it holds for newness, otherness, divergence from what currently prevails” (113). This way of conceptualizing architecture as a potential—something to-come—thus diverges from a tradition that frames the scope of architecture according to an “orientation toward

monumentality”—an overcoming of time “by transcending or freezing it” (Grosz 111). We are here closer to an architectural practice that, in Jennifer Bloomer’s words, “performs topological inversions [and] renders geometry fluid” (5). It is when exposed to topological uncertainty and deformation that architecture blends with queer theory. In a return to etymology, Sara Ahmed reminds us that “queer” “is, after all, a spatial term, which then gets translated into a sexual term, a term for a twisted sexuality that does not follow a ‘straight line’” (67).

In architecture, *poche* (French for “pocket”) refers to the space or material between walls (appearing as negative space on the blueprint). This is a potential space that allows the architect to carve out a niche, or pocket—the *raison d’être* of which depends on an exchange between object and surrounding space. Queer space imagines a conceptual architecture of the niche, which takes shape in the “excluded middle”⁵⁵ between affectation and truth—appearance and essence. The metaphor of the niche asserts the importance of negative space to buildings and texts alike. The interior of the chimney in Melville’s short story exactly comes to signify such a space of potentiality, as we shall see.

I see in Melville the promise of an “other” architecture that carves out a space for that which has otherwise failed to find a place. My methodology finds inspiration in what is referred to as “minor architecture,” which, prompted by Deleuze and Guattari’s writings on “minor literature,” can be understood as a “hollowing out of major architecture, an evacuating of the latter’s recognizable content (i.e. signification), verifiable substantiality (i.e. monumentality), and determinate status” (Ricco 6). Minor architecture, in other words, attempts to mobilize traditional conceptions of what architecture can “do” in an attempt to

⁵⁵ This middle place is “the imperceptible line dividing the A from the the –A, one binary term from its other;” it is “the only space of negotiation between them, the only room to move, the only position from which to insinuate a rift or hole into the self-defined term that establishes binary privilege, and thus into the orbit of the binary structure itself” (Grosz 93).

outstrip it of “the conservational impetus to retain cohesion and unity” (Grosz 92). Seen as a “force” rather than as a specific “form,” minor architecture comes to matter in reference to Melville’s chimney. The chimney is an architectural “folly,” a form of structure that is entirely “useless,” except to the extent that we can find utility in pleasure. The folly destabilizes architectural meaning, and the “what” and “why” of architecture are in turn disrupted. Moreover, the meaning of folly concerns spatial and temporal dislocation, and it thus becomes pertinent to show how Melville’s chimney is figurally displaced in other of his works. At the same time, this allows us to address the potential folly of anachronistically applying terms and concepts to a historically specific text. However, Melville’s architecture, insofar as it breaks with the prevailing nineteenth-century ideal of the picturesque, can best be described using the vocabulary of queer architecture as both his text and this theory are concerned with building towards eventual spaces devoid of the stringencies of symmetry.

As we saw in the introduction to this dissertation, hysteron proteron is not merely concerned with disrupting the temporal norm, chronology, but the turn backward may be prompted by an interest in turning forward—“fronting” the illicit, or exposing that which otherwise does not bear exposure to the light of day. The trope connotes at once the anxiety involved in seeing the order of things turned upside down *as well as* the potential for the surfacing of new, different ways of being. It is for this reason that, we may infer, Goldberg retains the word “sodometry” in the title of his book, since, as a “nonce-word,” it implies that sodomy can be viewed as “a relational term, a measure whose geometry we do not know, whose (a)symmetries we are to explore” (*Sodometries* xv). This fusing of sodomy with geometry will prove instructive for my reading of Melville, as I aim to delineate the asymmetrical tendencies of his prose, which, I argue, harbors the seed of a queer architecture. Minor architecture indeed pulses with a preposterous current. As John Paul Ricco puts it,

minor architecture connotes “a relation to architecture that is poetic, erotic, perhaps perversely poetic or poetically perverse” (7). The chiasmic reversal of syntactical elements can in this instance be read as a metaphor for the “promiscuous spatiality” (7) of a queerly imagined architecture. The great mobility of hysteron proteron—its capacity to describe temporal, spatial, and sexual inversions alike—is the perfect rhetorical ally to a minor, queer architecture.

II. The Origins of Melville’s Queer Style

We are all queer customers, M^r Duyckinck, you, I, & every body else in the world. So if I here seem queer to you, be sure, I am not alone in my queerness, tho’ it present itself at a different port, perhaps, from other people, since every one has his own distinct peculiarity.

—Melville, Letter to Evert Duyckinck

Good sense and an accurate taste must ascertain the limit [of rhetoric], beyond which, if it pass, it becomes extravagant.

—Hugh Blair, *Essays on Rhetoric*

Writing [for Melville] is a journey across, within, and into language; a coping through words requiring a descent into existence.

—Ruggero Bianchi, “Melville’s Process: Writing as Performing”

I love all men who dive.

—Melville, Letter to Evert Duyckinck

Melville’s narratives intermingle great heights and gloomy depths, boisterous, voluminous creations and pin-like details. In the words of Bryan Collier Short, Melville’s aesthetic “combines high self-consciousness with breathtaking rhetorical sensitivity and a

passion for dialectical oppositions and departures” (3). Melville’s rhetorical style performs these differences, and often crosses them, by investing his prose with tropes that, at various points, signal, embed, and overturn pairs of above/below, before/behind, overstatement/understatement. This is not always done in a tidy fashion. Often the binaries break down before they can even be properly ascertained. Melville’s writings explore the dialectical movement between dark and light, depth and surface, but the exchange between such polarities never can occur in an uncomplicated way, and his works are “clotted with multiple layers of rhetorical significance” (Short 4). His rhetoric gets in the way of a symmetrical structuring and contributes to an overall sense of crisis in his *oeuvre* that at the same time becomes the seat of a queer eroticism. In this chapter, I will take a “rear view” of Melville’s work. By focusing on the crossing of rear with before, down with up, in the short story, “I and My Chimney”—the central structure of which resembles “an anvil-headed whale” (9:355)—this will then perform a test case that can tell us something about Melville’s sense of the preposterous in general. In the preface to *Rhetoric in the European Tradition*, Thomas M. Conley suggests that rhetoric, in the classical sense of persuasion, becomes “particularly important to people during times of strife and crisis, political or intellectual” (viii). Indeed, the kind of language and language strategies that one chooses to use in a delicate or tense situation may in some extreme instances make the difference between peace and war. In a way related, we can say that certain rhetorical figures mark different points of crisis in Melville’s writings. And, to be sure, as Short suggests, we cannot describe Melville’s rhetorical development “in conventional terms” (4).

Melville’s anxieties as a writer can often be traced to a metaphysical theme. Privately and in conversation, Melville remained torn on the issue of the human condition and the possibility of human creation. According to Andrew Delbanco, the desire of the writer to

penetrate “to the depths of things” was for Melville tempered by the fear “that in fact there is nothing to be unearthed” (14)—no philosopher’s stone awaits the arduous explorer of universal Being with any certainty. At times, however, he regarded this with heroic *disregard*, and the absence of a totalizing secret at the core of Being would finally not “impair” his “sovereignty,” as he wrote to Hawthorne in April 1851 (14:186). This display of confidence has prompted Short to pronounce that Melville developed a sense of “unshakable faith [...] in the authority of his literary language” (5). In relation to *Billy Budd*, Attilio Favorini points out that the absence of “a metaphysical presence” is “allude[d] to in naming one of the ships [...] the *Athée* [the *Atheist*]” (399). No human judge can preside over Divine ordinance, rendered *in absentia*, least of all a writer of fiction. For this reason, Melville was never able to conform completely to a Romantic ideology of organicism, as no symbol of the world would ever afford a transparency of Spirit. In Melville’s short story, “The Bell-Tower,” for instance, the eponymous structure never becomes anything but a symbol of the builder’s pride, and it is all but fated to meet the same ignominious end as its creator, Bannadonna. Similarly, the “Himmalehan,” phallic imagery of Melville’s style, surging “upward and outward” (Chase 92, 124), always stands in danger of collapsing like the groined belfry of the “banned” tower. In the “The Bell-Tower,” the belfry crashes to the ground during the architect’s funeral, and Richard Chase reads this as an image of castration, which works by way of a pun on “groin” (124). Not much later, an earthquake brings down the entire bell-tower, and Melville’s punning style indeed often works by building-up his prose only to make it collapse on itself in a shattering of ironic clusters.⁵⁶ The prose is “groined”—that is, driven apart, or separated by a line, or vector, driving a wedge into the

⁵⁶ Walter Redfern points out that, etymologically, “‘exaggeration’ means a building-up” (92).

syntactical and narrative structure of the text. It is also at this point, however, in the space or gap thus created that we will come to locate in Melville a (tragic) queer sensibility.

The interplay between phallic images and castration, as well as that of depth and surface, high and low, results in a somewhat ambiguous style. In general, Walter Redfern avers, “Wordplay suits natures that are neither preponderantly straightforward nor esoteric. Its realm is that of the sly, the glancing, the teasing, the oblique. It is neither exclusively virile nor epicene, but androgynous: the area where man and woman overlap, the area of congress” (26). However, later in his study, *Puns*, Redfern points out the way in which wordplay, especially puns, has a propensity for teasingly turning things upside down. More to the point, depending on the specific author, they can be found at different points along “a spectrum of [...] topsy-turveydom” (94). According to Redfern, punning, irony, and parody all work by superimposing “two levels or schemes of references, so that we hear or see double” (93). Melville’s particular use of wordplay and different rhetorical structures subverts Redfern’s heterocentrist notion of linguistic “congress”—specifically in the way that rectal figures are seen to double onto phallic structures. Thus far, I have argued that we should think of the preposterous as a sodomitical principle of language, so while other scholars have speculated and advanced many convincing points about Melville’s (homo)sexuality,⁵⁷ in this chapter I will mainly be concentrating on the connections between tropological and syntactical disruption in his language, and the extent to which we can name his style queer. Hysteron proteron is established as the central trope in this regard. What is more, my reading of Melville presents his queerness as a result of the *precedence* of this rhetorical scheme over any kind of sexual motivation or intention of the author; the queer

⁵⁷ The instances of homosexual imagery and situations in Melville are manifold. Most conspicuous are perhaps the “marriage” scene between Ishmael and Queequeg in *Moby-Dick*, as well as the “Squeezing of Hands” chapter, which has received ample commentary already. In the remainder of this chapter, I will call to mind other less often noted instances of queer circumstances in his writing, both on a thematic and a figural level.

text, in other words, produced and continues to produce the queer author, in part through the retroactive imperative of reading. This does not mean that we should ignore the biographical details of Melville's life that affirm a certain homoerotic disposition, but, rather, that his rhetoric is crucial to understanding how this plays out.

Melville's preposterous style, linked as it is to various rhetorical devices, seeks to "not only depict the erotic but also perform it" (Martin, "Melville and Sexuality" 190). Lee Edelman has argued that "sexuality is informed by, and even constructed through, the operations of rhetoric," and in turn this means that "rhetoric carries with it a charged relation to sexuality for each of us" (*Homographesis* xvi). In consequence of this, "Language, syntax, the appurtenances of 'style,' *perform* more truly than they *register* an erotic cathexis, a condensation or dilation of pleasure, a circuit of fantasmatic identifications that articulate desire" (xvi). In "Melville's Fist," Barbara Johnson sums up the performative aspect of language: "Performative language is language which itself functions as an act, not as a report of one. Promising, betting, swearing, marrying, and declaring war, for example, are not descriptions of acts but acts in their own right" (575). "One finds the performative, then, whenever, in a given situation, *saying* something is *doing* something recognizable" (Johnson, "Poetry and Performative Language" 144). Performativity and rhetoric are surely linked. Rhetorical devices concern the immediate surface of the text—what the arrangement of phonemes, words and phrases does to the meaning of the text, quite independent of the author's intention. There is no depth to a text other than what the text itself can either perform for or suggest to us. Commenting on the inherent unreliability of words, Paul de Man says that, "Words have a way of saying things which are not at all what you want them to say. You are writing a splendid and coherent philosophical argument but, lo and behold, you are describing sexual intercourse" (*The Aesthetic Ideology* 181). As we shall see, the

circulation of language itself—the *doing* of the signifier—can be linked to a performance of eroticism, and vice versa. As I will show in my analysis of “The Encantadas,” eros-linguistic performativity reaches a pitch in Georges Bataille’s parodic “system,” where, in Gerard Loughlin’s summary, “The coupling of words performs the copulation of bodies” (143). The point to keep in mind about all this is that different rhetorical devices act out, in language, different sexual acts or attitudes.

Melville’s writing became increasingly laconic in his mid to late works, and whereas Edelman predominantly focuses on metaphor, synecdoche, metalepsis, and catachresis in his queer rhetorical readings, I will be concentrating on the interplay between litotes and hyperbole, which as a pair perform a syntactical form of irony. Actually, in many ways, “I and My Chimney,” the story of embattled domesticity, appears to catalogue prominent facets of a male queer strand running through the corpus of American letters in the mid-nineteenth century. Melville’s style is shaped by the tension between what he calls, in a famous letter to Hawthorne, a “banned” way of writing—which might more comfortably explore “a new taxonomy of desire” (Martin, “Melville and Sexuality” 189)—and, at the opposite pole, “the *other* way,” meaning a writing that is dominated by commercial concerns. This would sum up Melville’s “epistemological problem with the condition of writing itself” (Renker 115). Elizabeth Renker quotes a letter to Evert Duyckink in which Melville complains of the inability of an author to enter into a frank relationship with her or his readers. The idea that, as Renker summarizes Melville’s position, for an author, it would be “‘madness’ to speak the things that are terrifically true”—while, at the same time, it is mad “that an author can never do so” (Renker 115)—refers us back to the “banned” way of writing that Melville did not feel he was able to fully indulge in. This double-bind would finally lead Melville to construct an “unreadable” book: *The Confidence-Man* (Renker 114). Much earlier in his career, in a

letter from October 1849 to his father-in-law, Judge Lemuel Shaw, Melville writes concerning *Redburn* and *White-Jacket* that,

while I have felt obliged to refrain from writing the kind of book I would wish to; yet, in writing these two books, I have not repressed myself much—so far as *they* are concerned [...]. Being books, then, written in this way [for money], my only desire for their “success” (as it is called) springs from my pocket, & not from my heart. So far as I am individually concerned, & independent of my pocket, it is my earnest desire to write those sort of books which are said to “fail.” (14:138-39)

Commenting on the “double scale” of this letter, Jonathan Arac perceptively notes how Melville is here using “the same words to mean totally opposed things,” and “the model for this doubleness [is] Satan’s ‘Evil, be thou my good’” (*The Emergence of American Literary Narrative, 1820-1860* 131). Arac then proposes that, “Melville accordingly defines failure as success. Against the mere ‘desire’ that stems from the ‘pocket,’ there is the ‘earnest desire’ that comes from the ‘heart’” (131). But, significantly, Melville can only suggest as much through an inversion of “good” and “evil” that is, by a rhetorical recourse to hysteron proteron, which is activated by an act of reading.

Melville would go on to fail exceptionally “well” in the decade to come—financially as well as socially. Moreover, in a certain way, his scorn for the kind of success that is measured on the basis of units sold comes to anticipate a queer critique of “static models of success and failure” (Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* 2). For Judith Halberstam, “success in a heteronormative, capitalist society equates too easily to specific forms of reproductive maturity combined with wealth accumulation” (2). In the letter to Shaw, Melville seems to intuit Halberstam’s own feeling that, “Under certain circumstances failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more

creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world” (2-3); the only truly successful work, as Melville puts it, is one written “independent of my pocket.” The failure to keep to a certain path in life, inscribed with normative desires, might then engender a promise of possibility.

In his writing, Melville comments on the pleasure and risk of erring. Chapter 4 of *Billy Budd*, initially deleted from the manuscript (see the explanatory note on 404), opens in the following way:

In this matter of writing, resolve as one may to keep to the main road, some bypaths have an enticement not readily to be withstood. I am going to err into such a bypath. If the reader will keep me company I shall be glad. At the least, we can promise ourselves that pleasure which is wickedly said to be in sinning, for a literary sin the divergence will be. (291-92)

The personal pronoun shifts from the singular to the plural as the narrator propositions us to partake of his “sinful” detour. As a bit of literary antinomianism, the “wickedly” of the passage may provide a comment on moralism in literature; or, conversely, it may be meant as a way for the narrator to entice us further with the promise of unknown pleasures. Here we are reminded of Thoreau’s sauntering knight-errant, and, should we choose to keep him company, Melville’s cruiserly, or “plain-sailing,” narrator is promising to lead us on a path digressing to-and-fro through the text, leading us teasingly from point to point. What this achieves in terms of “the moral status of [Melville’s] rhetoric” remains ambiguous (Johnson, “Melville’s Fist” 582). Rather, I will once more invoke Short’s analysis, which argues that Melville dealt with the impatience growing out of his shortcomings and failures as a writer by seeking out and “putting into play new tropes” (5). Failure, in this case, thus translates into creative promulgation. This is not say that Melville was not pained by his dwindling

reputation and the ridicule he endured at the hands of his contemporaries, not to mention his financial troubles, but the ironic stabs he takes at himself in, for example, his last written work, *Billy Budd*, tells a less unequivocal story.⁵⁸

Riding on the successes of *Typee* and *Omoo*, Melville was optimistic about his project, but, according to Arac, Melville “found that, once [the literary market] had been entered, the world of literature opened horizons that he could not reach” (*Emergence* 132).⁵⁹ Lauren Berlant defines optimism “as the force that moves you out of yourself and into the world in order to bring closer the satisfying *something* that you cannot generate on your own but sense in the wake of a person, a way of life, an object, project, concept, or scene” (*Cruel Optimism* 1-2). There is something *ek-static* about optimism, then. In view of Berlant’s definition, it is not surprising that Melville’s optimism should mainly have grown out of the relationships he acquired in the literary scene—most notably that of his friendship with Hawthorne. In a famous letter addressed to Hawthorne, “tentatively dated Monday, 17 November 1851” (14:211), Melville records an enthusiastic response to the older man’s praise of his latest book, *Moby-Dick*. Despite the fact that he apparently had to wait a day before being able to pen a response to Hawthorne’s letter of admiration (now lost), Melville’s letter is full of exuberance and words of ecstatic optimism:

I felt pantheistic then [upon receiving Hawthorne’s letter]—your heart beat in my ribs and mine in yours, and both in God’s. A sense of *unspeakable* security is in me this moment, on account of your having understood the book [...]. *Ineffable* socialites are

⁵⁸ Melville refers to himself at one point, in the third-person, as “a writer whom few know” (345), but who is nonetheless “an honest scholar” (406). I owe both insights to Robert Milder’s editorial notes that accompanies the text.

⁵⁹ As opposed to the situation on the continent, as Anna Hellén notes, “the system of patronage had never taken root” in America (335), and combined with other factors this put American writers at an obvious financial disadvantage. Commercialization thus became wedded to the literary act early on.

in me [...]. It is a strange feeling—no hopefulness is in it, no despair. Content—that is it; and *irresponsibility*.” (212; my emphasis)

The rest of the letter is teeming with similarly overflowing prose and invocations to Hawthorne, calling him his “archangel” and “noble Festus” (213). It is not difficult to imagine the kind of embarrassment the shy and guarded Hawthorne is likely to have felt reading Melville’s over-the-top letter. That Melville’s otherwise extravagant mood should be tempered by a sense of “irresponsibility” could be because he knew he had written “a wicked book” (212). Melville was not an obtuse man, and he would surely have sensed that his letter could not possibly be met with a response from Hawthorne on the same level of affect; indeed, while we do not have a copy of Hawthorne’s initial letter, we know from Melville that his praise was delivered in a “plain, bluff” sort of way (213).

Melville’s ecstatic affect is so strong so as to lead him to confuse his parts with Hawthorne’s: “Whence come you, Hawthorne? By what right do you drink from my flagon of life? And when I put it to my lips—lo, they are yours and not mine” (212). The suddenness of the feelings that Hawthorne’s influence generated in Melville is likely the cause of the figural confusion that his letter displays here. As a result, Hawthorne’s body, or parts of him, suddenly appears to be laid on top of Melville’s own.⁶⁰ Melville seemingly greets Hawthorne’s influence with something less than complete abandonment, however (“By what right”)—as if Melville somehow knew that opening himself up in this way would constitute a risk. His feeling of contentment is further countered at the end of the letter by the anxious phrase, “when shall we be done changing?” (213). His “miserly delight” (213) would not last, and neither would the static contentment he allowed himself in the moment of

⁶⁰ Melville appears in this instance to be drawing on an early modern conception of friendship, according to the figure of “Acquaintance.” In *Textual Intercourse*, Jeffrey Masten unfolds the meaning of “acquaintance,” which Richard Brathwait personifies in *The English Gentleman* (1630), showing the reader how, in Brathwait’s depiction, “friendship is literally made corporeal in two bodies that are one” (30).

composing his letter. Just a year later, the language Melville used in corresponding with Hawthorne had been all but drained of its former sensuous liveliness, and Melville, an incorrigible “blurter-outer,” may have been somewhat jealous of Hawthorne’s wife, Sophia, “for whom his [Hawthorne’s] passion was frank and abundant,” apparently (Delbanco 211, 210). Not in want for trying, Melville was never able to penetrate the “plump sphericity” of Hawthorne (Delbanco 209), whom he referred to in the commemorative poem, “Monody,” as “the shyest grape” (l. 12).

In 1856, Melville managed to patch his ailing friendship with Evert Duyckinck (Parker 291), but his failure to maintain an intimate connection with Hawthorne would haunt him for the rest of his life. The estrangement from Hawthorne, in other words, may be why Melville’s sense of optimism in the early to mid-1850s was beginning to take on a cruel aspect. Berlant says that optimism becomes

cruel when the object/scene that ignites a sense of possibility actually makes it impossible to attain the expansive transformation for which a person or a people risks striving; and, doubly, it is cruel, insofar as the very pleasures of being inside a relation have become sustaining regardless of the content of the relation, such that a person or a world finds itself bound to a situation of profound threat that is, at the same time, profoundly confirming. (2)

The “sense of possibility” that failing to live up to normative standards of living and writing—in turn promising a queer sort of success—can easily turn into a new risk or threat; or it may point the subject towards an apocalyptic darkness, as in the case of Ahab, who has travelled so far to “the dark side of earth, that its other side, the theoretic bright one, seems but uncertain twilight to [him]” (6:528). The onset of optimism might end up turning the world upside down, which would mean that optimism can become preposterous as well as

cruel. Ahab places ultimate value on hunting the whale—a “profound threat” if ever there were one—and the cruel nature of his fateful vocation comes from the fact that his “striving” only becomes more concentrated after he sinks into the depths of madness, “so that far from having lost his strength, Ahab, to that one end, did now possess a thousand fold more potency than ever he had sanely brought to bear upon any one reasonable object” (185). In Ahab’s mad failure, he turns away from “the order of reasoning” (Levin 69), and the preposterousness of the whale-hunt is perhaps best symbolized in the broken quadrant, which Ahab destroys in a fit of hubris directed at the sun (6:501), signaling that his endeavor is literally “pointless.” Ironically, his failure is fused with potency, and he cathects his prey with more force than any sane or orderly object could ever inspire; in a Freudian turn of phrase, we could therefore say that the pleasure principle is rendered completely inoperative, as Ahab submits to the *jouissance* of the whale.

With *Moby-Dick*, Melville had already flirted with failure, which in reality would find a counterpart in the general response to the book when it was initially published. The presence of the “satisfying *something*” that Melville seems to have felt in the wake of Hawthorne’s delighted, if reserved, response to *Moby-Dick* was quickly transformed into a disappointing absence. Unlike the inventor uncle in Melville’s short story, “The Happy Failure”—who is glad when his curiously extravagant “Great Hydraulic-Hydrostatic Apparatus for draining swamps” fails (9:255)—it is doubtful if Melville ever felt the need to exclaim, “Praise be to God for the failure!” (260).

Melville’s early exuberance, at first glance, clashes with what we might call his “negative” 1850s—in an emotional as well as a rhetorical way (see Short 151). Elizabeth Renker describes Melville’s writing process of this period as being “discontented,” and “frustration and failure” were the emotional mainstays of his “writing life” (115). In his

paradigmatic study of Melville, *Hero, Captain, and Stranger*, Robert K. Martin claims that, “Melville’s sense of loss underlies all of his work of the 1850s, after *Moby-Dick*. Literary failure, the decline of the nation and the impending war, and personal isolation combined to deepen his sense of hopelessness” (97). This pronouncement follows a passage on the inability of American men in the nineteenth century to connect with and love each other. Melville’s sense of hopelessness, Martin argues, was an effect, specifically, of his failed friendship with Hawthorne, of which neither writer was, should we take Melville’s poem, “Monody,” as proof, “in the wrong.” Newton Arvin speaks of Melville’s yearning for male mutuality in the language of an “ancient need” (206). In *Early Modern Poetics in Melville and Poe*, William E. Engel argues that the two authors used different tropes and formal schemes “in a concerted effort to give voice to their nuanced understandings of mourning, melancholy, and loss” (2). However, this did unequivocally not lead to the kind of fellow-feeling Melville had been hoping for.

Failure, longing, depression, and illness—how did Melville manage to keep writing? I want here to examine the extent to which he succeeded in turning negativity into a point of resistance, thereby constructing a rhetorical style of “intimate [stylistic] excess” suffused with risk and pleasure (Otter 7). In some of his writings, different architectural forms are introduced as symbols against normative demands. The architecture of the chimney in “I and My Chimney” is such that it becomes a stumbling block to progress, rendered in the guise of hetero-domesticity. I see in this structure what Derrida calls “a formless desire for another form,” which is yet to be realized: “The desire for a new location [...] new ways of living and of thinking” (“Architecture Where the Desire May Live” 401).

III. The Preposterous and Minor Architecture in Melville's "I and My Chimney"

"I and My Chimney" was first published anonymously in *Putnam's Monthly Magazine*, 1856. Merton M. Sealts notes that the story was generally received by the public as a humorous sketch of domestic life (81). Melville wrote the story when he was residing at Arrowhead in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. Arrowhead was outfitted with a large, central chimney. The incorporation of several biographical details made members of Melville's family feel somewhat anxious about the story, however, and Sealts suggests that the fictional wife's insistence on having the chimney surveyed alludes to the "examination of [Melville's] mind that was reputedly made some time" after the publication of *Pierre* (83). While it has not been proven definitely that Melville ever underwent any kind of mental treatment, biographers and critics have widely noted the link between Melville's back pain and the narrator's sciatic disposition in "I and My Chimney." In his review of the critical field, Sealts shows how some Melville critics have tended to read the narrator's deformed spine as a metaphor for the author's unsound mind (87). This reading echoes our previous discussion of symmetry and the Hegelian contiguity between the soundness of form and content, body and mind. A careful reading of "Chimney," however, troubles the appropriateness of equating rectitude, or "straightness," with mental health. The trope of verticality nevertheless remains central to the story, and the entire plot of the story centers on the massive chimney, which is the source of both domestic and narrative tension.

Melville juxtaposes the unnamed narrator's old-fashioned ways with the desire of his wife to re-arrange the interior space of their house according to progressive, feminine ideals. In a drawing Melville made of Arrowhead in 1860, some years after completing "I and My Chimney," he added as a caption, "In the Olden Time" (15:642). The editors of Melville's

journals suggest that this caption “may be taken as humorous or may indicate that [it] was added in after years” (643). That Melville dates the drawing “A.D. 1860” further indicates his view of this domicile as being temporally peculiar; physically, it sits square on American soil, but its spiritual home lies somewhere else altogether, and the house can be seen as the projected embodiment of a fantasy space that cannot be located in any specific historical period. The chimney is the linchpin of this temporal dislocation. Not only out of time, wedded to a mythological past, the chimney is out of place; rather than America, “the proper place” for the “old chimney is ivied England” (9:356). John Allison claims that this is proof that Melville shared Hawthorne’s “trans-Atlantic conservatism” (18), as expressed in *The Old Manse*. In “Chimney,” the narrator’s attachment to what is old puts him at odds with family life: the male conservative comes to delight in his own marginalization, prompted by the institution of new, distinctly American forms. American architecture at this time, according to David P. Handlin, highlighted a tension between utility and beauty without distinct purpose (which translates to a certain luxuriousness that we have already encountered, and that I will analyze in full in Chapter 3). In *American Architecture*, he writes: “At a time when material concerns were thought to be dominating every aspect of American life, it became almost a matter of national urgency to assert the existence of spiritual values by emphasizing the independent nature of beauty in architecture” (72). In this way, it can be said that Melville dramatizes this tension between the function and pleasure of built forms, while at the same time gendering the difference. The conservatism of “Chimney” is ostensibly linked to a sense of spatial and temporal dislocation that initially responds to the misogynistic notion that placing woman before man is preposterous in itself. However, Melville is less concerned with diminishing the place of woman in the nineteenth century than he is with making room for male-male intimacy. Melville and Hawthorne’s

conservatism is rooted in pensive attitudes and a suspicion towards progress—although the former came to feel deserted by his friend, as, following his literary success, “[Hawthorne] had bartered friendship for celebrity and advanced to better, or at least worldlier, things” (Milder 100). Ironically, the more the narrator’s wife and daughters in “Chimney” push to abolish the cherished extension of his masculinity, the more grounded in the domestic space he becomes. David Dowling has suggested that the floor plan of the narrator’s house in “Chimney”—as well as the narrative plan of the story—“features the chimney as a giant phallic symbol protruding through the middle of the house around which rooms are divided and isolated” (48). Dowling is primarily interested in the chimney as a masculine symbol of resistance to “the marketplace appropriation of the writer’s imagination” (49), concluding that “domesticity functions as a viable, culturally accessible discourse through which Melville criticizes capitalism” (50). However, the viability of male-centered domesticity is namely put into question in Melville’s story, and the tension between feminine and masculine spaces is never finally resolved. As the central site of tension, the chimney further comes to function as the axis on which turns the inversion of vertical and horizontal structures in the narrative.

“Backwardness” quickly emerges as the general sentiment of the narrator, and the confusion of different spaces and directions (front/back; progression/reversal) thus works to enhance the profusion of ironic clusters in the narrative, as these become both foundational and fundamental to my reading. In the span of the two first pages of “Chimney,” “rear,” either as a prefix or stand-alone word, appears four times. The “rear” word-cluster (“rearward,” “rear-guard,” “rear”) in the fifth paragraph of the story works with another rear-pointing cluster, and “behind” is repeated five times. To properly get a feel for how Melville

employs these word-clusters to achieve his preposterous prose-style, I will here quote from the beginning of the story at length:

From this habitual precedence of my chimney over me, some even think that I have got into a sad *rearward* way altogether; in short, from standing *behind* my old-fashioned chimney so much, I have got to be quite *behind* the age too, as well as running *behind-hand* in everything else. But to tell the truth, I never was a very forward old fellow, nor what my farming neighbors call a forehanded one. Indeed, those rumors about my *behindhandedness* are so far correct, that I have an odd sauntering way with me sometimes of going about with my hands *behind* my back. As for my belonging to the *rear-guard* in general, certain it is, I bring up the *rear* of my chimney—which, by the way, is this moment before me—and that, too, both in fancy and fact. (9:353; my emphasis)

The narrator's "sauntering way" as it is related to his "behindhandedness" reminds us of the erotic connotations that we identified in Thoreau. "After" appears 19 times in the story, but while it can be grouped with what I call posterior-style words,⁶¹ it is frequently used to describe the wife's "itch" for fashionable things (362), and, as such, we might, in some instances, exclude it from the word-cluster denoting affects or attitudes related to the posterior, whether in a temporal or spatial sense. "Before" appears 14 times over the course of the story. In one instance, it is used to construct a litotes (understatement by means of a double negative) to indicate that the narrator is "behind" the chimney (in stature,

⁶¹ This play on "behind" and "before" occurs in *Moby-Dick* as well. When Ishmael is musing on the nature of the Sperm Whale's skull, we are told that, "If you unload his skull of its spermy heaps and then take a *rear view* of its *rear end*, which is the *high end*, you will be struck by its resemblance to the human skull, beheld in the same situation, and from the same point of view. Indeed, place this *reversed* skull (scaled down to the human magnitude) among a plate of men's skulls, and you would involuntarily *confound* it with them; and remarking the depressions on one part of its summit, in phrenological phrase you would say—This man had no self-esteem and no veneration" (349; my emphases). Turned round and upside down, the whale's skull turns into a representation of the human, whose *predominance* takes a *backseat* in this passage.

metaphorically, erotically...): “When in the rear room, set apart for that object, I stand to receive my guests (who, by the way call more, I suspect, to see my chimney than me), I then stand, *not so much before*, as, strictly speaking, behind my chimney, which is, indeed, the true host” (352; my emphasis). Five times it is used to indicate the mass of the chimney itself rising before the narrator or his wife.

Moreover, the anterior and the posterior frequently cross paths in “I and My Chimney.” The sort of hierarchical ordering displayed above, therefore, rather than diminishing the confusion, further enhances the profusion of ironic clusters in the narrative. Returning to our word-count in “Chimney,” “precedence” is used three times (in the same paragraph, nonetheless—the fifth of the story) to suggest the superiority of the chimney in relation to the narrator—ironically subordinating the personal pronoun, “I” of the story’s title; in this way, we could make a case for grouping it with the posterior-style class of words rather than any anterior-styled form. Hyperbole/litotes, before/ behind, precedence/after—all pairings, whether rhetorically, spatially, or temporally, fail to uphold a clear, binary division; the opposite characteristic of each term bleeds into the other. While the narrator often refers to himself in an exceedingly understated, yet wholly ironic, way, the chimney is described in hyperbolic terms throughout: “In fact, it was only because I and my chimney formed no part of his ancient burden, that that stout peddler, Atlas of old, was enabled to stand up so bravely under his pack” (357). There is no simple way to sever understatement from overstatement in the story.

In “I and My Chimney,” the rhetorical scheme of litotes is used, in an ironically hyperbolic way, at one point to create a contrast between the narrator’s “comfortable” relation to mortality—“in a comfortable sort of *not unwelcome*, though, indeed, ashy enough way, [he is] reminded of the ultimate exhaustion even of the most fiery life”—and the wife’s

“*unwarrantable* vitality” (273; all emphasis mine).⁶² “Ashy,” as considered in conjunction with the litotetic “not unwelcome,” alludes to “the grey zone” of litotes (Wouden 217), which in this case refers to an indeterminable space between “welcome” and “unwelcome.” This particular litotes points to his *not* quite welcome place in the home, but the fact that, at least symbolically, he is the master of the house, his presence is *neither* entirely *unwelcome*. This corresponds to the “pragmatic” level of litotes (Wouden 216). On the level of form, the “[e]conomy of expression” that the “inferior formulation” of litotes is supposed to express (Lausberg, *Handbook of Literary Rhetoric* 268), in Melville’s hands, is expanded in such a way that it negates its own subtle nature. In other words, a connoisseur of wordplay in general,⁶³ he plays with the inferior status of the narrator within the household, and in the process he creates a rhetorical double to the hyperbolic stature of the chimney. As a result, hyperbole and understatement come to form something like the objective correlate of the story. Such a correlate remains unstable due to the ironic force of either trope, and, there is nothing subtle about understatement, in other words; in general, each attempt at subtlety that Melville undertakes seems to contain at least an ounce of irony, which further disrupts the “symmetry” of his prose.

The before/behind confusion, as it works in conjunction with hyperbole and litotes, at times makes the relation between the narrator and his chimney seem ambiguous. William G. Crowley has noted that the chimney, as a symbol, is “ambiguous but definitely phallic” (qtd. in Sealts 91). Can something both be ambiguous and definite? For the chimney as a “definitely phallic” symbol, John T. Irwin quotes the part about “the chimney’s gentle heat,” which makes his wife’s geraniums “[b]ud in December” (295). But to which end of the

⁶³ Andrew Delbanco notes that Melville showed a penchant for wordplay early on, as, under a pseudonym, he had printed three newspaper replies, all of a “playful and exuberant” nature, to the candidate he defeated in a bid for the presidency of a local literary society in 1838 (26).

chimney would Irwin resort in order to take its temperature? The rear/before confusion of Melville's prose does not seem to call into question the fertility of the chimney, and it appears to represent different organs at once: the penis and the anus. For Melville, the theme of male birth had already surfaced in *Moby-Dick*, where Ahab's "firm," "calm" front does little to hide his "larger, darker, deeper part" (6:186)—his anus. Like the "captive king" of the "vast Roman halls of Thermes" who "sits in bearded state" "far beneath the fantastic towers of man's upper earth," Ahab appears to be both mother and father of the "sadder souls" that find themselves back at his "grim sire" (185-86). Even Ahab's dark bottom may turn up a fertile seed.

Irwin goes on to point out the doubly figural importance of the chimney as he compares it to the Egyptian god, Osiris, who in turn, according to Irwin's sources, is conflated with Apis, the bi-sexual cow/bull deity of ancient Egypt, and the chimney is, then, "associated with both the dismembered/life-giving phallus and the pyramid as tomb/womb" (297).⁶⁴ Irwin presents us with a valid reading, but his heterocentrist emphasis on phallus (male) and tomb (female) ignores the extent to which the chimney's "truncated" structure, decreasing as it does "towards the summit" (9:355)—like the whale's spinal canal in *Moby-Dick*, the chimney in Melville's short story "tapers in size" (6:349)—might as well be read as a (male) rectal figure, tapering towards the point of expulsion. As Mark C. Taylor has noted, in ancient Egypt the function of a pyramid could also be to "cover over the abyss" (424). For Hegel, Egypt was "the land of the symbol," and the pyramids came to signify the origin for all future architecture. The fate of architecture is to house Spirit, to which the building itself

⁶⁴ In this context, it is interesting to note that in German, as Laurence Rickels has pointed out, "the homonymic strands" that connect *Kastration* and *Kasten*, at the same time lead us to read the womb and the "cradle of death" together (*Aberrations of Mourning* 28). Furthermore, the theory of melancholia that Freud elaborated in conversation with other analysts in the early 1900s presents an "explosive doubling [...] of mouth onto anus, life onto death," and this is the answer, insofar as it can be called that, to what Karl Abraham called "'the riddle of the sphincter'" (*Aberrations of Mourning* 139).

is forever external. According to Hegel, architecture belongs to “unorganic nature,” as David Kolb points out, which has “no inner self-directed teleology” (85). As a consequence, the purpose of architecture is “to be the other, the surrounding for Spirit’s world” (85). But the pyramid, symbolizing the very earliest stage of architecture houses only the dead, as it is “the impenetrable, formal containment of an artificial rigor mortis” (Lacour 26). Melville’s chimney, on the other hand, complicates the Hegelian view, as it exudes both (undead) rectitude and vitality. Furthermore, there is a definite spiritual aspect to the chimney, as evinced by the name of its architect, Dacres, which can be read as an anagram for “sacred.”

When are we supposed to view the chimney as a metaphor, or another figure of speech, and when should we accept it as an actual object belonging to the deictic space of the story? If this is not entirely clear at all times, at the very least we can establish that it inhabits something like the deictic center of the story; the different adjectives and verbs used to describe it establish this: “preeminence,” “superior,” “minister” (verb). The center of any Melville story never simply affords a clear insight, however. This is evident here. The chimney we are told is the most spacious at its root in the “umbrageous cellar” of the house (9:357), and this is probably why the narrator is prompted to allude to that ancient giant, Atlas, when he is surveying the foundation of the chimney. The “numerous vaulted passages” of the cellar “resemble the dark, damp depths of primeval woods” (357). As rigid and straight as the chimney is, it yet has a certain affinity with or reliance on the earth, and it is only when the dark “conceit” of the cellar steals over the narrator—the alliterative “d” words spurn on his reverie in an evocative manner—that his wonder at the chimney becomes “deeply” penetrative (357).⁶⁵ At this time, Melville seems to invoke sculptor and essayist Horatio

⁶⁵ Kevin Ohi calls attention to how alliteration can work as a poignant marker of excessive moods, since this scheme, Ohi tells us, “attests to a signification system that has begun, arbitrarily, to refer not to anything ‘outside’ itself but only to itself and to its own internal structure” (“Devouring Creation” 264). A further,

Greenough, who in the essay “Social Theories” exclaims that, “We build our church up into the sky against the gravitation, but ’tis only the *downward tendency* that holds it *fast*” (104). When we consider the “sacred” signification of the chimney this connection stands out even clearer.

We can link a concern for the “downward tendency” of Melville’s chimney to what we have been referring to as “minor architecture.” This phrasing owes much to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s formulations on “minor literature.” In *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, Deleuze and Guattari discuss topography in Kafka’s work. They focus especially on the “surprising” contiguity between spatio-textual markers, and hallways and doors—even in instances where they are “diametrically opposed”—are connected “in such a way that things become all the more surprising” (73). Minor architecture revels in “bastard constructions” (Bloomer 52) that take form across the threshold of different “disciplinary terrain[s],” as Hélène Frichot puts it (64). This is a “perilous threshold” that Frichot describes as “the meeting place between the framing capacity of a provisional form and the forces which both facilitate and trouble its construction” (67). In “Chimney,” much as the unfortunate gentleman caller who succeeds in “backing himself into a dark pantry,” having failed to locate the right exit-way (9:364), we certainly experience surprising connections and ruptures in the architecture of the house—“never was there so labyrinthine an abode” (364).

prolonged alliterative series occurs in “I and My Chimney” when the narrator suggests that his wife “would have set in order that huge littered empire of [Peter the Great], and with indefatigable painstaking picked the peck of pickled peppers for [Peter the Piper]” (9:361). Reproducing the overwrought, not to say ludicrous, use of alliteration from the well-known nursery rhyme, in this case, serves rather to caricature the wife’s inability to distinguish between sense and non-sense. The narrator’s misogyny of course overlooks his own propensity for ostensibly non-sensical pursuits, which nevertheless hold great significance for him, at least when these concern his chimney.

“Going through the house, you seem to be forever going somewhere, and getting nowhere. It is like losing one’s self in the woods; round and round the chimney you go, and if you arrive at all, it is just where you started, and so you begin again, and again get nowhere” (364). However, the chimney, in all its spectacular and rectilinear glory appears to order the discontinuous parts of the house into a greater contiguous whole, even as it divides the wife’s plan to have a great hallway in its stead. The motif of the “immanent hallway” is the primary point of contiguity in Deleuze and Guattari’s analysis of Kafka’s topographies (75), but, and this without suggesting a complete contrast to Kafka, in Melville’s story the chimney is of course the main source of secrets, if not surprises, as it turns out. And its exterior form may not give a “true indication of the cavernous space that sprawls within” (Frichot 65).

On the face of it, it would appear ironic to speak of anything “minor” in relation to Melville’s chimney; but what is called minor architecture is emphatically not about size. It is more about the privileging of contiguity, or architectural metonymy, over the symmetrical nineteenth-century model of Andrew Jackson Downing, which depends on the “balance of *opposite parts* [...] to form an agreeable whole” (12). Nonetheless, Melville’s architecture contains one crucial element that intersects with Downing’s picturesque ideal, however peripherally. In “Picturesque Reform in the New England Village Novel, 1845-1867,” John Evelev writes that “the picturesque encompassed the roughness, irregularity, and variety of the ‘natural’ (that is, uncultivated) landscape” (150). “Chimney” contains an imaginary scene of “anachronistic [...] rural labor” (Evelev 151)—masons hard at work building the foundation of the chimney—and the reference to “old-ivied England” further evokes the picturesque. But the narrator appears withdrawn from social life, and he does not share his wife’s enthusiasm for domestic reform, which to a large degree characterized the picturesque ideal in American architecture of the nineteenth century; the story does not elicit a call for

either “religious, social, [or] political action” (152), and the rural trope, rather, serves a purpose that contrasts with the domestic model of Downing’s moralistic architecture—especially in regard to the erotic imagery surrounding the fundament of the chimney, as we will see. Melville’s non-normative vision of the domestic space gives birth to an asymmetrical aesthetic, which, while certainly evoking the “irregularity” of the sublime, is finally antithetical to what Evelev calls the “picturesque sensibility” of the American village novel (149).

Melville’s chimney is the epitome of irregularity, and there is not a direct path to the secret chamber of the chimney—which is said to contain a treasure, left there by the narrator’s ancestor; for this reason, the wife remains of the opinion that it would be a shame not to seek out and explore it (9:375). The baroque presence of the chimney compels the wife to desecrate its frustratingly un-telling form in an effort to unearth its cavernous interior. Such an endeavor would entail an expedition of destructive motives, as the discovery of the secret closet—if indeed it exists—would mean the end for the chimney, and perhaps even for the wife; indeed, the narrator warns her to stay out of the “ash-hole”—that “queer hole” behind the chimney—“Don’t you know that St. Dunstan’s devil emerged from the ash-hole? You will get your death one of these days, exploring all about as you do” (372). The narrator believes that “[i]nfinite sad mischief has resulted from the profane bursting open of secret recesses” (376). We are not convinced that his main concern is with his wife’s health, however, but rather that she leave the interior of the chimney alone. The wife continually complains of the smoke that both the chimney and the narrator’s pipe produces in seemingly equal measure. “How you two wicked old sinners do smoke!,” she exclaims, and part of her project is to locate whatever might be obstructing the ascent of smoke through the chimney (372).

In the late 1700s and early 1800s, Benjamin Thompson (becoming Count Rumford in 1792), the American-born scientist and sometime philanthropist, who contributed significantly to the development of thermodynamics, was trying to find a way of designing chimneys that would allow smoke to rise unhindered. As a result, he spent much of his time conducting experiments concerned with how to improve and cure so-called “smoking chimneys,” which due to several defects “forcibly prevent the smoke from following its natural tendency to go up the chimney” (224). Most commonly, what causes the obstruction of smoke to rise, according to Thompson, is “the bad construction of the chimney *in the neighbourhood of the fireplace*” (224). The best and most enduring “cure” consists of “merely reducing the fireplace, and the throat of the chimney, or that part of it which lies immediately above the fireplace, to a proper form and just dimensions” (224). Now, Melville’s narrator is not interested in any “natural tendency” of his chimney, as prescribed by Thompson; moreover, reducing the size of the chimney, or violating it in any way, would be a direct attack on his own sense of self, however “backward” it might be. On this point, the chimney shares an architectural element with the House of the Seven Gables that Hawthorne immortalized in his eponymous novel. Christopher Castiglia refers to the “queer interiority” of the Hawthornian house, the secretive nature of which provides a counter-point to the progressive impetus of making “inner life public and orderly” (189); indeed, “the house always ‘had secrets to keep’” (189).⁶⁶

In his book on Melville, Newton Arvin makes the case that “the famous Agatha story”⁶⁷ represents “a lurking and unconscious reproach in Melville’s wishing to force upon

⁶⁶ The actual House of the Seven Gables (known as the Turner-Ingersoll House prior to Hawthorne’s romance) contains a secret staircase (Chamberlain 34).

⁶⁷ While visiting New Bedford en route to Nantucket in the summer of 1852, the Agatha story was related to Melville by a friend of his father-in-law, the Massachusetts attorney general, John Clifford. The story centers on a “shipwrecked sailor named Robertson, who had been accustomed to finding ‘a wife (for a night) in every port,’” but after his accident he “married the woman (Agatha) who had rescued him” (Delbanco 206). After

Hawthorne's attention this tale of a woman deserted by the man from whom she had a right to expect nothing but complete loyalty" (206). At the time of writing "Chimney," Melville's relationship to Hawthorne had cooled substantially. Portraying himself, unconsciously, as a woman scorned, combined with the bi-sexual symbol of the chimney, leads one to consider whether we might in fact not glimpse Hawthorne's shadow in a nook or cranny of the "ashy" narrator's house—much as Melville upon reading *The House of the Seven Gables* in 1851, during the initial bloom of his friendship with Hawthorne, had imagined seeing "in one corner" of the "fine old chamber," which the book represented to him, "a dark little black-letter volume in golden clasps, entitled 'Hawthorne: A Problem'" (14:185). Might the chimney itself, then, not represent to Melville a "melancoly [sic] monument" to his erstwhile friend—like the wrecked ship of Agatha's absent husband (14:236)? No concrete evidence affirms this, and we find immediately more of Hawthorne in the "shy," "reticent," and "taciturn" Vine of Melville's long narrative poem, *Clarel*, as Arvin suggests (206).

As long as the chimney is left alone, it will be, in the words of David Dowling, "an object of meditation like the whale, unfathomable and incomprehensible from one vantage point within one field of vision" (48). But the narrator's reluctance to seek out the supposed secret chamber of the chimney does not mean, on the contrary, that he is not interested in knowing his chimney. From *Moby-Dick* on, according to Hershel Parker's biography, Melville became "extraordinarily aware of his states of being, so acutely aware of his self that to talk of bodily states and mental states is to set up falsely distinct categories" (12). The cellar scene in "Chimney" appears distinctly Melvillean, then, as the narrator's "body becomes absent-minded, absent of mind" (Parker 12). During his frantic exploration of the

making her pregnant, however, he disappeared. In a letter dated 13 August 1852, Melville proposed to Hawthorne that, feeling that the subject matter "gravitated" towards him (correspondence 234), he should build it into a work of fiction. Hawthorne declined. And Melville then set out to write what would become the now lost *Isle of the Cross* based on Clifford's material. According to the editors' notes accompanying Melville's letter, and it was completed on or around 22 May 1853.

chimney's bottom, the limitations of the narrator's sciatica-stricken body seem to disappear, and in his ecstatic mood (as opposed to sciatic) thus conjured, the narrator starts vigorously "digging round the foundation" of the chimney (9:357); in other words, the spirit of the chimney brings him out of himself, he is made hard and rigid under its influence. (Melville suffered from sciatica himself during the composition of "Chimney" [see Parker 261]).

At this point, through an etymological consideration of "fundament," the preposterous trope of the story re-emerges. Comparing a fourteenth-century physician's description on how to cure a fistula of the anus with "the author-surgeon's description of his own project," Jeffrey Masten concludes that, "In a culture where knowledge is figured as depth, the fundament may be fundamental" (137). Masten asserts that "the rhetoric of the fundament" reveals "an asshole that is not the derogated bottom of the lower bodily strata, not the backside of what should 'rightfully' be front-sided" (138). The ruin that provides the platform for Thomas Eakins' back-turned nude in *Swimming* would thus become a metonym of the painting's "fundament"—the rectal point of composition that displays the preposterous, and at the same time Eakins' composition allows us to locate the rhetorical and historical "underdetermination" of the work.

As Melville's narrator is digging, he imagines the toiling bodies of masons at work on the foundation while being either abused by the "sweltering" heat of "an August sun, or pelted by a March storm" (9:357). We here encounter an erotic metaphoric at work, grounded in images of strained male bodies. Being "a little out of [his] mind" (357), under the spell of the gargantuan chimney rising before (behind?) him, the narrator is feverishly "[p]lying [his] blunted spade" (357), and it does not take a stretch of the imagination to read this as a scene of masturbation. Furthermore, "plying" one's instrument, as it were, can be taken as an expression of individualism, or the exercising of resistance to outside, intrusive

forces, be they mercantile or otherwise, that are imposing on one's personal liberties. For example, when the candle-maker, China Aster, in Melville's *The Confidence-Man* is offered a loan by the fortunate shoe-maker, Orchis,⁶⁸ he recalls a saying of his uncle, the blacksmith: "To ply my own hammer, light though it be, I think best, rather than piece it out heavier by welding to it a bit of a neighbor's hammer, though that may have some weight to spare" (10:209). Taken with the digging scene in "Chimney," we thus see how autoeroticism becomes paired with a feeling of personal liberty. This ideal remains unfulfilled in "Chimney," however, as the narrator's sense of personal liberty is hampered by the fact that he struggles financially and in his marriage. This is surely why to Litman, "The farmhouse in 'I and My Chimney' is emblematic of a dystopian view of earthly possibilities" (635).

The un-Christian-like act of "knowingly [...] resid[ing] in a house, hidden in which is a secret closet," as the narrator in "Chimney" puts it to the architect, Scribe (9:369), places us in sodomitical territory. Patricia Parker has noted that hysteron proteron in the early modern period was used to denote blasphemous practices and behaviors that would seem to render "backward" the virtues and teachings of the Bible ("Hysteron Proteron" 139). In this way, the sacredness of the chimney is somehow profaned by the knowledge of the existence of the secret closet, and by the fact that the "spirit" of the chimney engenders erotic visions of male bodies in the narrator, who is then led to masturbate. Thus, there might be something inherently unholy about the chimney. To all intents and purposes, the masturbatory scene of "Chimney" is radically different from the exuberant "A Squeeze of the Hand" chapter in *Moby-Dick*, in which fellow-feeling is of the essence. The mood in "Chimney" is ecstatic, yes, but this story is void of camaraderie, and if *Moby-Dick* is concerned, in part, with

⁶⁸ From the Greek, *Orkis*, meaning "testicle," the name of the shoe-maker invokes a fertile connotation that, through association, thus contrasts with the general, social unproductivity of the narrator in "Chimney." I am indebted to Steven Bruhm for pointing out the Greek origin of this character's name.

delineating “a transformative sexuality in which men enjoy each other and, at least temporarily, abandon their place in the order of work,” as Robert Martin suggests (“Melville and Sexuality” 195), “Chimney,” written in the thick of Melville’s dark, depressive 1850s, deals rather with masturbation as a temporary measure against the frustrations of domestic life. Domesticity, Melville seems to say, abolishes the spirit of adventure, and ruptures the possibility of male-male intimacy. In lieu of inter-personal intimacy, autoeroticism becomes a partially fulfilling reprieve from domestic pressures, and masturbation, in different times and places, can indeed work to create private spaces in complicated living situations.⁶⁹

While the activity of “plying one’s spade” indicates phallic masturbation,⁷⁰ “digging in [one’s] cellar” (9:358) can be read as a self-probing of the anal cavity. No wonder then that the interruption of the narrator’s masturbating—which he directs both to the front and back of his body, engaging in “preposterous discoveries” (Parker, “Hysteron Proteron” 140)—should be judged the more “ungracious” (9:357). The confusion of before/behind that we have identified in Melville’s prose is now clearly eroticized. Historically, sodomy involves all non-procreative acts, and a form of masturbation involving both the penis and the anus can be considered doubly preposterous as a consequence. John Allison contends that the narrator comes to his senses “out of respect for the concealed mystery of sacred interior” (21). But we must take issue with this reading; for whereas the narrator acknowledges the “profane” (9:376) nature of “plying” his chimney for secrets, as it were, while frequenting the more “sensible” upper levels of the house, the cellar’s influence on him is simply irresistible. In fact, he stops his plying only when intruded upon. Melville provides us with an

⁶⁹ Reflecting on her childhood home, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick remarks that “I used to assume I craved privacy in order to masturbate so much—now I also imagine I masturbated so much as a way of hollowing out a privacy for myself within the permeable ear of my room” (“Queers in [Single-Family] Space” 32).

⁷⁰ Leslie Fiedler and William G. Crowley in *Love and Death in the American Novel* and “Melville’s Chimney,” respectively, have both pointed out the phallic nature of the chimney, albeit not in terms linked to masturbation (see Sealts 91).

additional anal pun when a neighbor encroaches upon the scene. The neighbor teasingly asks our anti-hero if he is “[g]old digging” (358). That the narrator regards the chimney as growing out of himself (either as a phallic embodiment or in the guise of excrement) is clear when he, in an agitated voice, warns the neighbor not to become—“ahem!”—“personal” in inquiring about his plans for the chimney (358).

But perhaps it is more apt to say that it is the other way around, that the narrator’s idea of self is rather contingent on the state of the chimney. The ambiguity of his rhetoric most notably evinced in the spatial confusion of before/behind could be seen as a way of “protecting the crypt” against intrusion (see Sealts 85), and it is clear that the wife, in lieu of her “proposed hall,” will not succeed in penetrating the chimney “all the way into the dining room in the remote rear of the mansion” to make room for “a modified project” that the narrator fails to comprehend (9:363). Apart from the deictic reality of the story, the protectiveness of the narrator towards his chimney can also be extended metaphorically to the author, Melville, who sought to protect himself against readerly “fathoming.” While in the company of his friend, Evert Duyckinck, Melville relished “ploughing deep and bringing to the surface some rich fruits of thought and experience” (Duyckinck qtd. in Parker 291), he might not have enjoyed an equal probing of his own inner being. We must here nevertheless go against William Ellery Sedgwick’s feeling that, “One dislikes to probe into the interior of this almost wholly charming piece [“I and My Chimney”]” (qtd. in Sealts 83-4).

“Crypt” is derived from Greek *kryptein*, meaning, “to hide” (Heller, et al. 82). In Latin, this became translated into the noun *grupta*, from which we have “grotto.” The authors of *The Private Lives of English Words* inform us that the adjective “grotesque” “is a combination of *grotto* and *crotto*” (82). In “Chimney,” the wife’s inability to comprehend the unseemly or potentially grotesque significance of the chimney might be because “she never

thinks of her end” (9:361). “End” is here meant to denote demise, but given the story’s attention to spatial metaphors it might just as well serve as a pun on her rear-part, her body’s “grotto.” Curiously, her defiance of old age does not hinder her from investing ideologically in the future; indeed, she is “spicily impatient of present and past” (361). The progressive attitude of the wife is biased towards everything forward-pointing, whereas contemplation and an orientation towards history and pastness translate into the narrator’s affinity for “behindhandedness.” The bottom of the chimney is his alone to survey. In “Chimney,” the spatial dialectics of height and depth thus turns to a horizontal confusion of phallus and anus, rendering “hindpart foremost” (Parker, “Hysteron Proteron” 140).

IV. Melville’s Follies

As has been shown, the anomalous foundation of the chimney induces madness, or folly, in the narrator, and this takes on an erotic connotation in a scene of masturbation. In architecture, the term “folly” is bestowed upon “any costly structure considered to have shown folly in the builder” (*OED*). For example, installing “half-buried ruins” on the grounds of one’s country estate to give off a playful air of antiquity could well constitute such a folly (Reynolds 113). Based on Scribe’s estimation of the chimney in Melville’s story, the magnitude of the structure is entirely devoid of economic sense (9:366);⁷¹ it is what Pieter Boogaart has termed a “folly of passion” (87). The chimney fails as a proper architectural edifice in another important way. Being out of proportion with the rest of the house, in John Ruskin’s theory of proportionality, which is inherent to the picturesque, the chimney would

⁷¹ Mr. Scribe’s estimation of the narrator’s chimney is of course more or less ironic, as his own abode is outfitted with “four chimneys in the form of erect dragons spouting smoke from their nostrils” (9:368), and thus no less foolish than the narrator’s.

fail to elicit a “single feeling of pure material beauty” (Downing 10), as it is too “cumbrous” (Ruskin 69). To achieve beauty in proportion, a building “will neither be too long nor too broad, too low nor too high” (Downing 11). The problem of defining “the *beau idéal* of a chimney,” as Ruskin puts it (65), has to do with the fact that “we may imagine what it ought to be, [but] we can never tell, until the house is built, what it *must* be” (65). Caught between two modal verbs—denoting expectation and obligation, respectively—the chimney as a concept creates a problem for the architect, since ideally, but not practically, the chimney would not be fashioned until after the completion of the house proper. While to Ruskin a chimney can never be beautiful on its own terms—it can only be considered as such in a supplementary way, becoming a “beautiful accompaniment” to the house (63)—it is crucial to the formation of a pastoral “scene of peace,” attenuating the decorous stillness of smoke rising from the top of the chimney (63). For Ruskin, beauty and utility are close cousins—“what is most adapted to its purpose is most beautiful” (77)—and any given chimney should always adhere to the “variety” of the house it is attached to.⁷² The variety of the house, be it English, French, or American, will therefore determine the architecture of the chimney. Melville’s chimney, as a result, would be judged entirely inappropriate according to Ruskin’s aesthetics, as it disrupts the “organic continuity” of the house, to which it belongs (see Dow Adams 267). The chimney is at its base “precisely twelve feet square,” which, as the narrator gleefully exclaims, indeed seems an inordinate “appropriation of terra firma for a chimney” (9:357). And “its dimensions, at times, seem incredible,” even to him (358). It works against the propriety of magnitude, and its sublime shape can only properly be comprehended “by a sort of process in the higher mathematics” (358).

⁷² Architecture must always pay close attention to its surroundings, and conform to national norms. The archetype of the English cottage, for example, in Ruskin’s scheme, will reflect the “snugness” of the British landscape; like “every quiet nook and sheltered lane,” the English cottage will be “equally small, equally sheltered, equally invisible at a distance” (13).

Appreciation of form is innate to the human condition, according to Downing. It therefore follows that, “the want of proportion in a building is felt as a great and irremediable defect” (12). Ruskin’s scheme, however, allows for “*fantastic* chimneys, provided they are kept in unison with the rest of the building” (74). Of course Melville’s chimney has a real function in the story, to let out smoke, which it nonetheless only achieves in a partial way, as we have seen. (The narrator’s house itself is not asymmetrical, we should note, and proportion and symmetry need not be present at the same time, according to Downing [14]). The architectural folly can be traced, in part, to the Latin word, *follis*, as Boogaart points out, “meaning something convex, such as bellows” (90). While not in shape, the chimney, as a “blower,” can functionally be related to this etymological origin. But this is more or less completely overshadowed by its figurally ambiguous property as a point of folly. From the French, *la folie* denotes or points to an unsound state of mind, but it can also mean “delight” or “favorite abode” (*OED*).⁷³ The chimney thus represents a *heimlich* sort of delightful madness. Sacredness is never far from madness, and the foundation itself is inscribed with both qualities, as the anagrammatic hint of the name, Dacres, tells us. Usually, a folly will denote an outside structure, something like an obscene, “inflated” or convoluted garden ornament, but the central property of follies is a lack of utilitarian purpose; rather, they “are idiosyncratic buildings whose primary purpose is to please,” as Boogaart’s definition tells us (87). Tracing the etymology of “folly” to the French further, we learn that what used to be called a *folie* was a sort of “second home” which afforded the occupant a reprieve from the “public laws” governing “the cabarets and taverns” in eighteenth-century France (see

⁷³ The folly as “delightful” structure is usually linked to “consumer desire for the [British] middling and upper classes,” starting by the end of the eighteenth century (Reynolds 89). Nicole Reynolds notes that especially the archetype of the “laborer’s cottage”—imbued as it were with harmony and “rural virtues”—became “the kind of retreat from the duties of class or profession and the distractions of urban” that was seen as desirable at this time in British society (89). The American architect, Andrew Jackson Downing, revered the archetype of the English cottage, which he saw as the paragon of “domestic virtues” and “rural beauty” (26). Ironically, then, the modest habitat of poor country laborers thus became an “emblem of foolish luxury” (Taylor 426).

Boogaart 90-91). *La folie*, as a *temple de l'orgie*, consequently came to be associated with “licentiousness” (91). From an eighteenth-century French police report, Boogaart extracts a number of terms related to the *folie* of one Baron de La Haye: “*scandaleusement, nudité complète, monstrueux désirs* and *milles choses secrètes dont on ne savait parler sans rougir*” (91). Such a structure seems to have been lifted straight out of Sodom. The chimney in Melville’s story provokes an ecstatic state in its “owner”—it puts him outside himself in a moment of “monstrous desire” (see Boogaart 91). As a beacon of ecstasy, it can therefore, in an ironic way, be considered an “outside” structure, by its very dislocation to the inside, or the way in which, by virtue of its function, it traverses inside and outside. And again the preposterous is seen to turn on a transversal and consequent confusion of two diametrically opposite points. We can thus refer to the chimney, somewhat pleonastically, as a “mad” folly.

Architecture, according to Jacques Derrida, “inaugurates the intimacy of our economy, the law of our hearth (*oikos*), our familial, religious, and political oikonomy, all the places of birth and death, temple, school, stadium, agora, square, sepulcher” (*Psyche, Volume II* 90). The folly, on the other hand, can be related to the conception of “architectural transformation[]” (Dow Adams 270). “When a building is built for one purpose but used for another [...] the idea of form representing function is altered” (270). And this represents to Horatio Greenough, whom Adams quotes, a severe “symptom[] of decline” (270). Follies, however, purposefully subvert the original intention of their structure, or they can aim at artifice by utilizing naturally occurring structures, such as the grotto, for spectacular means or to invoke a romantic fantasy, “remote both in time and place” (Pierson 14). Follies also have an erotic component. As Mark C. Taylor points out, the word “derives from the stem ‘*beu*’ (swelling, flowing, flowering), which it shares with the Greek ‘*phallos*; *phallus*, *ithyphallic* (*ithy*: erect: carried at festivals of Bacchus...)” (426). Follies provide “an escape

from the regulations that police routine behavior” (426), and it is thus not surprising that the narrator of “Chimney” should feel an “it(c)h” whenever he is near the base of his “swelling” chimney. Recalling Goldberg, follies align with sodomtries, therefore, in the way that they offer a switch-point between the licit and illicit—they trouble normative notions of architectural propriety by creating habitats for what may otherwise not suffer the light of decency.

The architectural base of Melville’s chimney puts us on the path towards a minor architecture shrouded in “near-darkness” (Ricco 70): total darkness defies any kind of exposition, and complete revelation betrays the quality that darkness holds. Minor architecture, in this way, belongs to the litotetic grey zone of the in-between, caught between two extremes: light and dark. The “secret closet” of the chimney, much speculated about by the characters in the story, may “conceal problematic aspects of [the narrator’s] identity,” as Katja Kanzler has pointed out, since it is rumored that the narrator’s ancestor and the builder of the house, Dacres, “made his fortune not as a merchant but as a pirate” (325). In “The Encantadas,” Melville suggests that both pirates and poets are wont to be “self-transforming,” “bemocking,” and “self-upbraiding” (9:142); the metaphysical poet, Abraham Cowley, is alluded to. As such qualities tend to “run[] in the blood,” according to Melville, it “might *not* seem *unwarranted*” (142; my emphasis) to identify a comparison to the narrator of “Chimney” here. The litotetic construction of this passage connotes a sense of mock-modesty. The teasing deferment of knowledge that defines litotes also has some of the “open secret” about it; the truth winks at us from the abyss.⁷⁴ The secret chamber of Melville’s

⁷⁴ Litotes simultaneously connotes a level of indeterminacy and excessiveness by the preposterousness of the doubly negative: it refuses clear affirmation, while turning towards an affirmative gesture against itself. Bryan Short states that litotes “protect[s] poetic language from genealogical determination while opening it to incessant phantasmic echoes” (146). And here we should note the temporality of litotes: it is a crossing of prolepsis with anteriority; the initial negation looks towards the second and final negation that, while slowing the progression of narrative by turning back towards the first negation, completes the scheme. In Short’s

chimney nevertheless remains hidden. But some of its allure resurfaces in another text. In addition to a sense of spatial impropriety, architectural follies often lack “historical consciousness” (Reynolds 139). Nicole Reynolds uses the example of nineteenth-century architect, George Soane, to show how the inclusion of follies in homes and museums can induce in the viewer a feeling of “spatial dislocation” and “temporal disorientation” (114). Similarly, the sacredness of the chimney serves to unhinge spatial limitations—as in the straightening out of the narrator’s sciatica during his ecstatic digging—and, by allusion, the preposterous spirit of the chimney re-emerges in the exotic context of “The Encantadas.”

V. The Blessed and the Banned

[C]ursed be all the things that cast man’s eyes aloft to that heaven, whose live vividness but scorches him, as these old eyes are even now scorched with thy light, O sun!

—Ahab in *Moby-Dick*

[t]o have one’s hands among the unspeakable foundations, ribs, and very pelvis of the world; this is a fearful thing.

—Ishmael in *Moby-Dick*

On his tour of the Mediterranean in the late 1850s, Melville rode along the walls of Constantinople that had been devastated by invaders in the fifteenth century, and he paid especial attention to the “[g]reat cracks & fissures” of the “huge square towers” which mark the structure every “150 yards or so,” according to the author’s estimates (15:61). “In one

diagnosis, litotes “subverts accumulating meanings,” and creates “a textuality struggling to move forward” (146, 150). The positive meaning that the double negation presumably advances is born in the meeting-point of past and future that we still struggle to call the present. First of all, the positivity of litotes always comes *after* or is added on to the scheme of litotes by an interpretive act of the reader. It can only be said to be present by virtue of the reader’s vigilance. We can express this by way of a mathematical formula: $-a \times -b = c$. Or for the sake of accuracy, we should rather say that $-a \times -b \approx c$, since the double negation only *approximately* equals a positive. An aura of the negative will always remain.

tower you see a jaw of light opening; the riven parts stand toppling like inverted pyramids” (61). This is like the image of a ravished landscape following a Dionysian festival. The wider parts of the ruined towers have since been cultivated as “garden spots” (61), and this inspires Melville to make an allusion to I Corinthians 15:42—as he often did during this period of his life (see the editorial appendix to Melville’s journal 401)—which reads, “So also is the resurrection of the dead. It [the body] is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption.” In Melville’s parody, specific to the context of his excursion, this proverb is rendered as, “sowed in corruption & raised in potatoes” (62). Fascinated by the duality of death and fertility, the “primal look” of the ruinous landscape, “skirted by forrests [sic] of cemetery,” the walls seem to him “the inexorable bar between the mansions of the living & the dungeons of the dead” (62). The walls, in other words, function as a threshold of deviation—a point of contact between Eros and Thanatos that nevertheless betrays the symmetry of each. At a further point in his journey, when approaching the Dead Sea, the Plain of Jericho to him “looks green, an orchard, but only trees of apple of Sodom” grow there (82); in Mark Taylor’s words, the “refused resurfaces” (426). The rough, erratic listing of impressions, often devoid of verb-tenses, gives the passage dealing with the Dead Sea an infertile air. According to the editorial note, the fruit Melville described was probably not a true Apple of Sodom (15:428), but he, like other nineteenth-century writers, was fond of drawing on the biblical description of the fruit as consisting of a beautiful shell hiding an ashen substance; the Apple of Sodom, in other words, in Melville’s hands would become a living form playing host to death. Thus, to us, it comes to serve as a powerful symbol of Melville’s metaphysical anxiety, but the rhetorical conflation of barrenness and fertility has stylistic implications as well in terms of his writing.

The “spell-bound desertness” of the Galapagos as they appear in “The Encantadas” (9:128), located far from “Christian society” (145), not surprisingly suggests to the narrator “living things malignly crumbled from ruddiness into ashes. Apples of Sodom, after touching, seem these isles” (110). “The conspicuous absence of the gods” in “The Encantadas,” William E. Engel points out, “contributes in large measure to the desolate, fallen, and explicitly ‘Plutonian’ world reported by [Melville’s] alter ego, Salvator R. Tarnmoor” (7). We see the conflation of above and below in the example of Narborough, the mountain which gives us a glimpse into “the unspeakable foundations [...] of the world” (6:136)—the “Plutonian” underworld. Melville describes the isle of Narborough, “the loftiest land of the cluster [the Enchanted Isles],” as appearing “like a gigantic chimney-stack” (9:139). In the “upper dark” at the top of Narborough’s “five or six thousand feet,” “dire mischief” is going on: “There toil the demons of fire, who at intervals irradiate the nights with a strange spectral illumination for miles and miles around” (141). The subterranean dark of the domestic New England chimney of Melville’s other tale is turned upside down, and it is as if the foundation that the narrator in “Chimney” so furiously is trying to uncover is finally revealed in a figure of spatial inversion in the region of Galapagos near the Equator. The “dark craggy mass” of the volcanic Narborough is like earth’s bowels turned inside out; it is the perversion of “the arborescent thrust of the Gothic vault and spire” (Ranciere, *The Aesthetic Unconscious* 29). And like Shelley’s *Mont Blanc*, the “great mountain” (l. 80), “piercing the infinite sky” (l. 60), owes much of its sublimity to the “unfathomable deeps” of the vales below (l. 64). In “The Encantadas,” the sublime heights of Narborough provoke in Melville’s narrator not only “the full drama of volcanic eruption,” but it is as if the rocky

summit of the island, inhabited by mischievous beings whose natural abode is the underworld, provide a localized scene of ascent and descent—a preposterous spectacle of fiery, demonic vitality and barrenness.

Melville's descriptions of Narborough appear to anticipate Georges Bataille's preposterous system of the *Jesuve*, which he introduces in the essay "The Solar Anus." *Jesuve* refers most obviously to *Vésuve*, and the first image that Bataille connects it to is indeed that of erupting volcanoes, which are not, as the reader may otherwise initially have expected, directly phallic in Bataille's system, but rather "serve as [the terrestrial globe's] anus" (*Visions of Excess* 8). The *Jesuve*, then, corresponds to the entrails of the earth turned inside out; however, only a few lines later, Bataille tells us that, "The earth sometimes jerks off in a frenzy, and everything collapses on its surface" (8). Like in the masturbation scene of "Chimney," Bataille's *Jesuve* blends the anus and the phallus in an explosively confusing trope. But it is not quite a trope after all, nor exactly a philosophical concept. Instead, it would be more accurate to say that it serves as the open-ended principle of expenditure in language. What Leslie Anne Boldt-Irons calls the "intellectual violence" of "The Solar Anus" is an attack on all the discourses (be they Cartesian, Hegelian, Romantic, or Surrealist) that "lay claim to an impossible achievement: that of arriving at a 'total identification' [which is similar to what Schlegel calls *eine reelle Sprache*], whereby the subject manages to embrace a 'transcendent whole'" (355).

In his commentary accompanying "The Solar Anus" in the collection *Visions of Excess*, Allan Stoekl informs us that *Jesuve* "is apparently a word devised by Bataille himself; its meaning is open to conjecture" (259). Drawing on and expanding upon Stoekl's short list of words that we can perceive in Bataille's neologism, David Farrell Krell provides the following accumulation of terms that the *Jesuve* may encompass: "The *Jesuve* is not only

Jésus, which in France is both a savior and a sausage, but also *sève*, the sap of Dionysos;” further, “the *Jesuve* is both the volcano, *Vésuve*, and the goddess, *Vénus* [...]. The *Jesuve* is both *dessous* and *dessus*, both the above and the below of the vertical axis” (155). Important to note here is that what is being parodied is not negated. In a certain way, we might posit that the *Jesuve* resembles litotes, in the way that litotes makes a mockery of both negativity and positivity. In the movement from one to the other, all sincerity is lost. The interval between the positive and the negative is the realm of parody. Put differently, litotes does not manage to either expel or absorb its own excessive negativity. The inversion is not complete.

Theo Davis has described how Melville in his writing grandly “reach[es] toward a literary ideal in which form and content are fused into a third, shimmering thing, but also for a restive, almost obsessive, desecration and denial of this ideal” (34). As Davis notes, critics have mostly concentrated on showing how this plays out in *Moby-Dick*—the ubiquity of whiteness in the novel comes to mind. The failure of idealization also occurs, perhaps most dramatically, in Melville’s examination of verticality. Melville’s architecture of vertical structures follows a system in which height is accompanied by depth.⁷⁵ The architecture of the *Jesuve* is similarly one of above and below, each being a parody of the other, neither excluding nor directly privileging one over the other. In “The Bell-Tower,” as the architect and “mechanician,” Bannadonna, stands atop his finished tower he gazes “upon the white summits of blue inland Alps, and whiter crests of bluer Alps offshore—sights invisible from the plain” (9:175). Not only are the sights invisible to the crowd below but so is Bannadonna’s gazing eye itself, which is soon “turned below, when, like the cannon booms, c[o]me up to him the people’s combustions of applause” (175). However, while there seems

⁷⁵ Linguistics supplies us with at least two antecedent examples that correspond to this confusion. In his review of Karl Abel’s “The Antithetical Sense of Primal Words,” Freud tells us that in Latin, “*altus* means high and deep,” and in German, “*Boden* (garret, ground) still means the attic as well as the ground-floor” (CP 4:189).

to be no doubt that the movement of the architect's eye is prompted by the roar of the applauding crowd on the ground, his down-turned gaze might at the same instant reflect upon the fact that the tower was raised in a fit of hubris. His entire ethos is offensive to metaphysical truth, and, for him, "common sense [is] theurgy; machinery, miracle; Prometheus, the heroic name for machinist; man, the true God" (184). For Bannadonna and Nietzsche's Zarathustra alike—who yearns to "climb over [himself] – up, upward," ever upward, until even the stars are beneath his feet, in order to reach the "*ultimate peak*" (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 122)—"spirit has proven only a burden weighing man down and impeding his flight" (Sallis 81). Bannadonna's uncanny "flight of stone" (Sallis 81) must fail, however, and his unholy tower is finally reduced to a "dank mold cankering [the city's] bloom" (9:174). Does the earthquake that topples the tower really come as a surprise, then? Was it not always meant to be collapsed?

Bannadonna's architectural model follows "Nietzsche's schema," which, as John Sallis points out, "is one of inversion: rather than being elevated toward spirit in such a way as to prepare the *Aufhebung* that submits it to spirit, stone replaces spirit, exchanges places with spirit, their order being reversed, its terms inverted" (81-81). The erection of the tower can certainly, and straightforwardly, be considered as "an act of self-aggrandizement" (Thomson 29). Further, "Bannadonna's departure from the artistic precepts of Greek architecture is a danger sign" (Litman 637). A blasphemer against God's law and the laws of nature, Bannadonna is scornful of modesty and temperance in the construction of his titanic tower. He seems to represent the will of the Nietzschean architect, for whom building is a matter of pride, "the victory over gravity" (see Lacour 27). But, in effect, the story comes closer to dramatizing what Sylvia Lavin calls "architecture's Sisyphean effort to achieve elevation" (10).

Banna in Italian is a form of the verb *bannare*, meaning “to ban” (someone abusive); so, *Bannadonna*, “the unblest foundling,” could be read as “banning the woman.” This recalls the theme of infertility in Melville, and Bannadonna’s “disunity of purpose” (Stein 116) renders his ambition for the tower fruitless. After Bannadonna slays one of his workmen, who, out of “fright,” paid insufficient detail to the casting process of “the great state-bell” (9:175), a cranial “splinter” “[f]rom the smitten part” of his victim happens to be mixed in with the material, creating a blemish that Bannadonna covers over (176). But as Melville had undoubtedly learned from Hawthorne, the repressed always returns. The inappropriate mixing of materials weakens the “spine” of the structure, and the form of the tower fails to cohere with the content of Bannadonna’s ambition. Bannadonna embodies the paradox of wanting to tread in heaven with the gods while being prohibited from doing so due to the limitations of his humanity. The fire of genius is no match for the fiery wrath of the gods, as symbolized in the blazing sun. A fetishist of machinery and man-made forms, Bannadonna’s entire project turns on a basic disregard for the lesson of Babel (174). (The Tower of Babel, Clay Lancaster argues, should in fact be considered the first architectural folly of Western culture).⁷⁶ His tragic flaw, however, comes not as a result of his failing to recognize the inherent limitations of his human form, but rather from unsuccessfully realizing that ascent is not fundamentally different from descent. As Kofman so accurately summarizes Bataille’s point,

Only a prohibition prevents one looking into the face of the sun, turning it into a symbol of moral elevation and the highest level of knowledge; a symbol of the father whom one cannot look in the face for fear of castration. Once the prohibition has been

⁷⁶ Lancaster surmises that the Tower of Babel would have resembled “the great square ziggurat” of the Sumerians, to whom are attributed “[s]ome of the earliest manifestations of sophisticated civilization” (20). One such ziggurat had “walls [that] sloped inward somewhat and all lines were given a slight convexity to relieve the optical illusion of sag one gets in extended straight planes and contours. On one side three staircases of one-hundred steps each rose to a common pinnacle” (21).

transgressed, the sun is no longer a star but a disa-star [...] a volcano which spews out its energy extravagantly, an ejaculation without reserve. (181)

Moby-Dick presents us with a formidable symbol of this inversion: the doubloon that Ahab promises to whomever among his crew first spots the whale. Stamped upon the doubloon are “the likeness of three Andes’ summits; from one a flame, a tower on another; on the third a crowing cock; while arching over all [is] a segment of the portioned zodiac, the signs all marked with their usual cabalistics, and the keystone sun entering the equinoctial point at Libra”—“all are Ahab” (6:431). The “coined sun,” as Ahab calls it, is a mirror of one’s “mysterious self” (431)—the “keystone sun” is in fact analogous to “the mad secret of his unabated rage [which is] bolted up and *keyed* in him” (186; my emphasis)—and Ahab sees in it a tempestuous image of birth and death: “From storm to storm! So be it, then. Born in throes, ’tis fit that man should live in pains and die in pangs,” while Starbuck spies in “the sun of Righteousness [...] a beacon and a hope” (432). The chapter notes a few other interpretations of the coin, until poor, mad Pip—“a miniature Ahab” (Levin 66)—shows up to round the chapter off with a parody of interpretation itself: “I, you, and he; and we, ye, and they, are all bats; and I’m a crow [...]. Caw! caw! caw! caw! caw! caw!” (434). The bat is a parody of the crow, and the doubloon, in Pip’s unhinged monologue, becomes the parodic embodiment of “some old darkey’s wedding ring” (435), which leads to a recitation of a “traditional minstrel song,” as the editorial note tells us (894). But the parody itself always hides its own inversion, and “man’s insanity is heaven’s sense” (414). Along with Pip’s (non)sense, the significance of the doubloon drains into the vital blackness of the vortex along with the Pequod.

VI. Conclusion: After-pleasure

*And wrecks passed without sound of bells,
The calyx of death's bounty giving back
A scattered chapter, livid hieroglyph,
The portent wound in corridors of shells.*

—Hart Crane, “At Melville’s Tomb”

*Then for Urania, virgins everywhere,
O pray! Example take too, and have care.*

—Melville, “After the Pleasure Party”

Like “Monody,” “After the Pleasure Party” was written in commemoration of Hawthorne’s death (Stein 107). And whereas it may relate to “educated women’s repressed sexuality” (Parker 422), we know that in the Victorian era “Uranian” was used to refer to male homosexuals, and it is not certain that Melville thought of the Urania in “After the Pleasure Party” as unequivocally female. In the Platonic tradition, Aphrodite Urania is male-oriented, and Uranus was of course born without the aid of a female womb.⁷⁷ In the penultimate line of Hart Crane’s poem, “At Melville’s Tomb,” he alludes to “Monody,” which is largely attributed to Melville’s (thwarted) friendship with Hawthorne. We can conclude, with Crane, that the “fabulous shadow” of Melville’s Hawthorne “only the sea keeps.” The first stanza of “Monody” reads:

To have known him, to have loved him
After liveness long ;
And then to be estranged in life,
And neither in the wrong ;
And now for death to set his seal—
Ease me, a little ease, my song!

⁷⁷ As Delbanco relates, Melville knew Plato’s *Symposium*, and in *Pierre* Melville alludes to the Platonic text in exploring Pierre’s “sexual love” for his cousin, Glen (Delbanco 182).

The alliterative “a” sounds of the stanza lull us into a quiet “ease.” In return, Crane appears to implore of his reader, in an almost bathetic way, may our “silent answers” silence Melville’s “portent wound,” and may the warmth of our care thaw his “Frosted eyes” (Crane, ll. 13, 8, 11).

Inversion upon inversion—the work of the preposterous. It is such that we would characterize Melville’s rhetorical (lack of a) system. Branka Arsić provides an apt description for the assumption that underlies my methodology as I have employed it in this chapter, without however naming it preposterous: “To open oneself thus means to throw oneself into the open. Openness is not only the metaphor for a wound but suggests openness for helplessness, a desire for vulnerability” (“Melville’s Celibatory Machines” 88). In his writings, Melville shows both a desire for as well as a fear of this kind of openness. As a way of concluding this chapter, I will turn the reader’s attention to a particularly sodomitical episode from “The Encantadas.” In this episodic narrative, we encounter a “cursed man” by the name of Oberlus, whose appearance, “from all accounts,” is “beast-like” (9:162, 163). The allusion to Oberon is perhaps not accidental, and while not fairy-like he is certainly “burdened with darkness and bound down by accursed powers” (Normand 14). His “countenance [is] contorted, heavy, earthy,” and the allusion to the *Fairie Queene* that begins Sketch Nine of “The Encantadas” puts Oberlus “low [...] on the ground,” “degraded to [the] level” of tortoises (162, 164). A “volcanic creature,” Oberlus appears to have been expelled from the earth “by the same convulsion which exploded into sight the isle” of his abode, a veritable “Tartarus of clinkers” (163, 169). He is an excrementous creature who invariably

has developed the “mysterious custom upon a first encounter with a stranger ever to present his back” (163). Even the geography of the island is confused, and the Black Beach—“a wide strand of dark pounded black lava” leading to Oberlus’ den (162)—is in fact located “on the island’s northwest coast, not the south side,” as John Woram tells us (168).

Beyond even the ostensibly debased nature of Oberlus, “a still further proneness” lurks (9:164). Like Caliban, Oberlus is prone to rape. (The entire Sketch Nine reads like an allusion to *The Tempest*). When a cruel mood strikes him he goes hunting for victims with his “shocking blunderbuss” in order “to prove his potency upon the first specimen of humanity which should fall unbefriended into his hands” (165). He preys on and abuses other people’s vulnerability and confidence. After a failed attempt, he succeeds in enslaving a few unsuspecting seamen who are kept in check by “that shocking blunderbuss” (166), which, by way of repetition, we can judge Melville found equally “shocking” to his own imagination. If the theme of rape is only alluded to, there is nothing subtle, finally, about the image of his slaves performing as “plebian garter-snakes to this [the blunderbuss] Lord Anaconda” (166). The misanthropic, perverted Oberlus is the embodiment of violent sodomy. As a degenerate fantasmatic offspring of anal desires, he “refuse[s] to see the human face” (164). Oberlus’ entire being is preposterous, and this part of “The Encantadas” is expressive of Melville’s anxious relation to homoeroticism. Loathing and desire, however, are not diametrical opposite, but each might undergird the other. And, for all his brutality, there is something enticing about Oberlus’ “ursine suavity” (165). But would Melville ever let such a beast of a man “plough” deep into his being? Melville should undoubtedly prefer Hawthorne’s delicate “cloistral vine,” as he describes it in the elegiac poem “Monody”.

The deictic and syntactical cuts and wounds that we find in Melville’s literature can point to a concern for the preposterous which does not need to spell death. In this chapter I

have occupied myself with the ripped and tormented textures as they appear in Melville's prose and poetry (and life). Derrida says of modern and postmodern architecture that each strives "to create a different kind of living which no longer fits the old circumstances" ("Architecture Where the Desire May Live" 400). As a result of this, "A completely new rapport between surface – the drawing – and space – architecture – is emerging" (400). The same can be said for the architecture of Melville's writing—which imitates "the action of ripping" (400)—and out of which a queer kind of living may become possible. This is a queerness that might be seen to grow out of failure, but the type of failure that succeeds by the "formless desire" of a promise (401). This means that we must become attuned to a kind of knowledge that can ascertain when "a promise is being given even if it is not kept in its visible form" (401). As such, my Melville leads us towards a queer place "where desire can recognize itself, where it can live" (401)—and like Urania in Melville's poem, "After the Pleasure Party," we may then hope to learn from, live with, and "care" for our failures.

Chapter 3: Hawthorne's Children

I. Introduction: The Baby-House

In a piece written in the style of a letter addressed to Richard Manning, Hawthorne's cousin (not to be confused with his uncle of the same name), Nathaniel Hawthorne describes the "ancient site of a proud mansion" known as Browne's Folly (23:402), which was once situated somewhere outside Salem, Massachusetts, on a "conspicuous hill" (399). As we will remember from the previous chapter, a folly is a generally "useless" structure that in some contexts can refer to a "second home"—but one of pleasure rather than domesticity, which appears to have been the case with Browne's Folly (400). An earthquake in 1755 obliged the proprietor "to locate it on humbler ground" at the bottom of the hill (401). Later, it was "fashioned into three separate dwellings" that were moved to locations unknown (401-2). The imprint of the house can "still be traced [...] upon the summit of the hill," however, and "[t]wo shallow and grass-grown cavities remain, of what were once the deep and richly stored cellars, under the two wings" of the house (402). These "cavities" offer a site of refuge for weather-worn travelers as well as for Hawthorne's "young townsmen, who may be afflicted with the same tendency towards fanciful narratives which haunted me in my youth, and long afterwards" (402). This "affliction" had rendered the author's mind "unprofitably fertile" in pursuit of "those little narratives" that made up the stories in *Twice-told Tales*, for example (399). The connection between ostensibly unproductive imaginings and the ruin of what was once a magnificent "pleasure-house" is not accidental (400). The "ambitious site"

of the edifice “rendered it indeed a Folly” (400-1), Hawthorne suggests, but in addition to its status as a “favorite” abode, “whose primary purpose is to please” (Boogaart 87). Such houses, in the French context, as we know, are often linked to “licentiousness” (91). The pleasures that may have been housed at Browne’s Folly are not known to the reader, as the proprietor, a royalist, “fled to England during the Revolution” (Hawthorne 23:401). In the years following, the mansion deteriorated into a state of disrepair, but the memory of past opulence lingers in the form of a “mysterious closet,” which contains “a mighty pile of family portraits” revealing “a vision of people in garments of antique magnificence—gentlemen in curled wigs and tarnished gold lace, and ladies in brocade and quaint hairdresses”—as discovered by “some schoolboys” who set upon developing the “secrets” of the closet (401). Unlike the secret compartment of the chimney in Melville’s story, the closet of Browne’s Folly easily reveals the excessive, and potentially damning, qualities of the former inhabitants. There is something demonic about this closet, Hawthorne suggests, but it is nevertheless vividly connected to the imagination of young boys and his own “unprofitable” mind, “afflicted” with fancy; and the link between an interior, hidden space and odd male endeavors is once again affirmed. The “tumultuous” array of old world decadence that comes “tumbling” out of the closet forms an analogue to the idiosyncratic (another descriptor of the folly) architecture of Hawthorne’s mind, and the interior space of his imagination responds to the cavernous interior of the house. Moreover, like the two “cavities” that make up the ruin of the mansion, a figural “furrow” (402) connects his mind with the closet.

Writing in 1860, four years before his death, Hawthorne would not complete another major work. This sketch might therefore well be considered as an allegory of his own dwindling output and creativity. (Follies, we will remember, often connote an unsound state

of mind). There is something comforting, nonetheless, about the cavities that represent the ruin of Browne's Folly: they offer shelter to troubled young men, and this "bottom-ruin"—having slid to the edge of the hill on which it was initially erected—has simultaneously become a monument to his own perceived folly as a "romancer" *and* the site of potential male community, shielded from the "public laws" of the town (see Boogaart 90-91). In this way, if we are to see one of these cavities as Hawthorne's imaginary resting place, who might we expect to occupy the other cellar, connected as it is to the first?

Jeffrey Masten has shown in his study of textual collaboration and homoeroticism in early modern England that collaborations came to be seen as extensions of the dwellings that playwrights shared in life as well as in death (being buried together). As Masten points out, "collaboration was a prevalent mode of textual production in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, only eventually displaced by the mode of singular authorship with which we are more familiar" (*Textual Intercourse* 4). Collaboration seems not to have suited the thrust of individuality permeating the literary market place of nineteenth-century America. Perhaps for this reason, Hawthorne envisioned a less direct form of collaboration with his audience, one that ideally would begin in the early years of his readers and grow throughout their lives. In his historicist reading of Hawthorne's literature for children, Derek Pacheco suggests that "sympathy" for Hawthorne can be read as an allegory of the bond between producer and consumer of literature. Part of Hawthorne's literary strategy, according to Pacheco, rests on harnessing the "'sympathy of childish intimacies'" and "entreating [his young readership] for the love and acceptance he thinks crucial to the success of his career," and that when "his

young readers do mature and hear of the deeds of *his* manhood, that is, the stories and books he has written and will write, they might feel enough stirring of interest about the life of their early literary companion to purchase and read his adult works” (306, 310, 306).

However, Hawthorne’s conception of sympathy clearly goes deeper than that. In a letter to his wife dated 27 February, 1842, he writes:

I am glad to think that God sees through my heart, and if any angel has power to penetrate into it, he is welcome to know everything that is there. Yes, and so may any mortal who is capable of full sympathy, and therefore worthy to come into my depths.
(15:612)

Does he imagine that his wife is “capable of full sympathy”? His use of the male pronoun leaves us in doubt. What might it take to penetrate the “cloudy veil [that] stretches over the abyss of my nature” (612)? The frank invitation to enter his “depths” could be conceived of as a more personal variant of the loving bond between writer and reader that he idealizes in his tales for children (see Pacheco 310). But Hawthorne might be playing coy here, as it is unlikely that any mortal would actually be “capable of full sympathy.” The only living person who *might* be worthy and able to fathom his depths turns out to be, not Melville, or Hawthorne’s wife, but Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Hawthorne’s attachment to Longfellow inhabits a somewhat obscure position in his *oeuvre*, and this chapter will not explore in any great detail Longfellow’s influence on Hawthorne’s characters or themes; nevertheless, Hawthorne’s correspondence to Longfellow contains many allusions to the primary elements of Hawthorne’s work concerning the theme of childhood—which is the central interest of this chapter—and, as such, these letters provide us with a convenient way to further introduce Hawthorne’s literature dealing with children to the degree that it explores different non-normative masculine subject positions.

On March 21, 1838, Hawthorne wrote to Longfellow, his former classmate at Bowdoin College, about the possibility of collaborating “on a collection of fairy tales for children” (Sánchez-Eppler 150); Hawthorne imagined that he and Longfellow would “twine for ourselves a wreath of tender shoots and dewy buds” (15:267). His use of this particular image could stem from the fact that, as he put it late in life, he felt he “grew up without a root” (12:257); this had meant that he continually “long[ed] to be connected with somebody – and [yet] never feeling myself so” (257). Indeed, as Gloria C. Erlich notes, “Hawthorne’s penchant for botanical imagery,” derived from “the horticultural-scientific interests of [his uncle] Robert Manning,” lends itself to the creation of something “unnatural” in tales such as “Rappaccini’s Daughter” (131). The influence of Manning, Erlich argues, produced in Hawthorne an “innate tendency toward passivity,” which may have been “magnified [...] by the enforced intimacy of sharing a bed with Uncle Robert over many years” (118). Whether or not anything overtly sexual transpired between young Hawthorne and his uncle (Erlich and James R. Mellow are divided on this issue; see 118 and 610, note 66, respectively), Hawthorne’s tendency toward passivity carried over into his relationship with Longfellow, and his use of “twine” in the above instance supplies us with an allusion to the early modern ideal of “twinship” that is central to the meaning of “acquaintance,” as Masten has pointed out (*Textual Intercourse* 29). This word has the connotation of “indivisibility,” and while Hawthorne was consistently uneasy about “physical intimacy” (30)⁷⁸—unlike Melville, as we have seen (page 138 above)—the idea that the souls of two individuals could become “indistinguishable” would certainly have appealed to him (30). Despite their life-long admiration and respect for one another (see Thomas Woodson’s Introduction to *The Letters*,

⁷⁸ David Greven has noted that Hawthorne depicts the “mock-marriage” of Dimmesdale and Chillingworth in *The Scarlet Letter* as “ludicrous” and “perverse” (*Men Beyond Desire* 125); it is “a union that signifies enmity, not intimacy; a bond that sees commingling as violation, not joining” (125). This leads Greven to reference Hawthorne’s visit with Melville to a Shaker village, where Hawthorne famously, and violently, disapproved of the same-sex sleeping arrangements (see James R. Mellow 378).

1813-1843, *Centenary Edition* 15:45), Hawthorne and Longfellow's collaborative project never came to fruition. However, the aforementioned letter provides us with a glimpse into Hawthorne's fantasy of collaboration which is tied to a peculiar identification with the diminutive stature of the proposed audience. Much like Hawthorne's alter-ego, Eustace Bright in *Tanglewood Tales*, Longfellow was to be Editor of their "baby-house," as Hawthorne referred to the proposed collection, while he would "figure merely as a contributor" (15:267, 266). The twisting of their imaginative strands creates for Hawthorne a masculine parentage, in which Longfellow plays the patriarch, whereas Hawthorne, as mere contributor, appears as almost closer in stature to the "baby-house" itself. This creates an opposition, then, to David Greven's claim that "maternal identification" is the primary force driving his writing (*The Fragility of Manhood* 41).

The twining of affection appears as a leitmotif elsewhere in his *oeuvre*, as in "The Gentle Boy" where we are told that poor Ibrahim's mind "is a plant that would twine beautifully round something stronger than itself, but if repulsed, or torn away, it had no choice but to wither on the ground" (9:89). It is difficult not to see in this metaphor a connection to how Hawthorne conceived of himself in relation to Longfellow. In a later letter of the same year, 1838, Hawthorne now addresses Longfellow as "dear Professor," widening the gap of authority (and maturity) between them further, and invokes Longfellow's "instrument," through which he will "blow[] your blast" of poetic inspiration (276). (Hawthorne in yet another letter complains, tongue-in-cheek, that Longfellow "refuse[s] to let me blow a blast upon" his "instrument" [288]).⁷⁹ In Hawthorne's correspondence to Longfellow, creative production appears largely as a fantasy of male birth, the offspring of

⁷⁹ Here we should remember the association to "the stinking trumpet" that Lacan makes much of in his analysis of a courtly love poem by the medieval troubadour Arnaut Daniel. In what Lacan calls "a sudden reversal" (*Ethics* 163), the lady of the poem orders her suitor "to put his mouth to her trumpet" (162)—her anus. We might then consider which part of the body—before or behind—Longfellow's "instrument" stands in for.

which would spring from a source more potent than what had produced “such withered and dusty leaves as other people crown themselves with” (267). We can here introduce Wayne Koestenbaum’s insight concerning male collaboration: “men who collaborate engage in a metaphorical sexual intercourse, and [...] the text they balance between them is alternately the child of their sexual union, and a shared woman” (3). However, does the text necessarily have to be gendered female? Following Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s theory of “homosociality” in *Between Men*, the proposed collaboration between Hawthorne and Longfellow would come to serve as the mediating object of their intimacy. But as Hawthorne identified with the text of the baby-house, he invariably put himself in a passive position. Longfellow was certainly the “top” in this arrangement, and he was not keen on sharing the text with Hawthorne. There seems to be evidence to suggest, in fact, that Hawthorne saw himself as both “rival” to and “beloved” of Longfellow (see *Between Men* 21). As a result, no “procreation” took place. As with the “Agatha” project—“the most remarkable story Melville and Hawthorne never wrote *together*” (Kelley 174)—only a “residue” in the form of letters and journal entries remains of the baby-house. The latter unwritten project thus appears as the reversal of the Agatha incident, in which Hawthorne was the one to disappoint his potential collaborator, Melville.

Whereas they failed to find a way of balancing the text between each other, the origin of their thwarted collaboration reveals a more equal position. It seems probable that their shared project was meant to serve as a sunny distraction from the “trouble” both men had been experiencing the year before. Longfellow confessed to Hawthorne that he had “suffered more sorrowful changes, than I should be willing to tell you in a letter, or you to read” (15:254, note 5); and Hawthorne is as melancholy as ever when he writes to Longfellow that, “I have made a captive of myself and put me into a dungeon; and now I cannot find the key

to let myself out—and if the door were open, I should be almost afraid to come out” (251). This fragile and tender point in their correspondence is fraught with a sense of longing for a shared sense of intimacy that Hawthorne perhaps more than Longfellow hoped to see fulfilled in the baby-house book; twenty years later, such promise of intimacy had been relegated to a ruinous image, as it appears in the text of “Browne’s Folly.” Koestenbaum states in *Double Talk* that, “Double writing, like good citizenship, sublimates homoerotic longing” (18). As the book never came about, their potential for homoerotic attachment could find no outlet—the “sublimation” was to remain incomplete.

Moreover, the very diminutive stature of the baby-house may point us to a further dark connotation. Freud, in “Mourning and Melancholia,” according to Laurence Rickels, “associates miniaturization with death”—“the ego bearing the open wound of melancholia shrinks, just as the melancholic considers himself to be, in every respect, ‘small’ and inferior” (*Aberrations of Mourning* 39)—we might then come to see the baby-house as a kind of tomb. In this way, the fantastical dwelling that Hawthorne imagined for Longfellow and himself connects to his later depiction of the devastated structure of Browne’s Folly. As we noted above, the two cavities that form the fundament of the ruin are at a distance to each other, separated but linked by a furrow in the ground. Even if we are to read the ruin of Browne’s Folly, then, as the fantasized resting place of Hawthorne and Longfellow, it is clear that the two “graves” are kept apart, each becoming a marker of male solitude, while, by a measure of association, they hint at a potential of intimacy. A fragment from the latter half of the 1830’s provides us with a measure of proof to suggest that Hawthorne found the possibility of building and residing in “pleasure-houses” unviable:

Two lovers to plan the building of a pleasure-house on a certain spot of ground, but various seeming accidents prevent it. Once they find a group of miserable children

there; once it is the scene where crime is plotted; at last the dead body of one of the lovers or of a dear friend is found there; and instead of a pleasure-house, they build a marble tomb. The moral,—that there is no place on earth fit for the site of a pleasure-house, because there is no spot that may not have been saddened by human grief, stained by crime, or hallowed by death. (8:25)

The theme of embedded sin or misery is of course highly familiar in relation to Hawthorne's work. But, in this instance, we may also infer that—based on Hawthorne's attachment to Longfellow, the thwarted plans for the baby-house, and the ruin of Browne's Folly—there is “no place on earth fit for the site” of in-dwelling male intimacy.

This might also prompt us to see Hawthorne's correspondence with Longfellow as another point of deferral, which, with “its potentially infinite capacity for displacement” (Grosz, “The Strange Detours of Sublimation” 141), is the *raison d'être* of sublimation. We might therefore read Hawthorne's imagined queering of the family circle that the baby-house represents as an addition, or supplement, to his early “child-scapes,” such as “Little Annie's Ramble” and “The Village Uncle.” Both of these stories explore alternative kinship models that, in conversation with other prose pieces, anticipate Hawthorne's wish to create a male family space with Longfellow.⁸⁰ Adult women are more or less absent from the stories that I will explore in the following sections; these stories are predominantly about adult males at different stages of their lives who in different ways strive to create childish attachments. We might in fact wager that perhaps the absence is not feminine at all; that perhaps the loneliness of the characters has more to do with the thwarted intimacy between men.

⁸⁰ Hawthorne's fiction is populated with numerous lonely male spaces that serve as reminders of failed intimacy: Pluto's gloomy palace in “The Pomegranate Seeds,” the chambers of Dimmesdale and Clifford in *The Scarlet Letter* and *The House of the Seven Gables*, respectively.

In this dissertation, I have argued that desires that could not find easy expression within the culture of the mid-nineteenth century in America as a result were to surface in figurally intricate and inverted ways. Reading the texts of this period preposterously is one strategy for trying “to see through and around the prism of our own conceptual categories and into an experience that was, necessarily, ordered and conceived differently” (Coviello, *Tomorrow’s Parties* 161-62). (For example, Peter Coviello suggests that *The Blithedale Romance* “is a novel in which a form of sexual typology that would arrive fully only decades later casts its shadow, as it were, *backwards*” [163; my emphasis]). In this sense, insofar as Hawthorne identifies both with his child characters and the adult males they interact with, we might therefore wonder if his literature for children in fact stands in for real-life attachments. While this line of inquiry falls outside the purview of this chapter, I will suggest that we can think about the lost potential of male-male intimacy as forming the unconscious of Hawthorne’s fiction for children. Nostalgia, furthermore, names the primary affective structure of the Golden Age thinking that frames Hawthorne’s idea of childhood. Accordingly, David Greven suggests that “a longing for lost origins [...] suffuses Hawthorne’s work” (*Fragility of Manhood* 41). This leads Hawthorne continually to explore “the nature of parent-child bonds” (41). In this chapter, therefore, I wish to call attention to the fragility of adult-child bonds and the different disruptions that undercut such attachments.

Ultimately, a sense of loss and longing appears to accompany the rhetorical reversals of the preposterous in the case of Hawthorne. Particularly, while the child is of course temporally anterior to the adult, there is a certain sense in which the child has “birthed” the adult one has become—the past both *precedes* and takes *precedence* over the present. This understanding was of course central to romantic thought, and Wordsworth put it most succinctly in the poem, “My Heart Leaps up when I behold,” in which “The Child is father of

the man” (l. 6). This line and the two following it make up the epigraph to the longer poem, “Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood.” The external “pigmy size” of the child that Wordsworth apostrophizes here (l. 86) is incongruent with “Thy Soul’s immensity” (l. 109) and “thy being’s height” (l. 127). Hawthorne similarly speaks of the intellectual “level of childhood” that we struggle to “raise” ourselves to (7:179). Hence, growing up constitutes a regression of sorts, and, as Frederick Schiller puts it, the adult subject is “someone aspiring for unity. The correspondence between his feeling and his thinking which existed *in reality* in the first state, now only exists *as an ideal*” (39). It is this tension between “high” and “low” to be found in the figure of the child, and how it influences adult thinking about childhood, that will form the main preposterous current of this chapter.

In what follows, I will show how the notion of “dimunitiveness” becomes important for Hawthorne’s conception of the child. A sense of the preposterous is historically related to “deflation,” physically and figuratively regarding class, as Patricia Parker has shown in relation to the final act of *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, in which, for example, “The diminutive Moth (or ‘mote’) appears as the ‘Great Hercules,’ in a disproportion so marked that it requires an ‘apology’ that asks the audience to imagine Hercules in his infancy” (“Preposterous Reversals” 469). This ostensibly comic inversion contributes to the overall texture of Shakespeare’s “sustained ‘arsy-versy’ play” (468), the final act of which works to deflate otherwise “inflated” characters “by a performance that disfigures even as it ‘stands for’ or represents, thereby making greatness ‘familiar’ [i.e., ‘low’]” (469). This reminds us of

how Thoreau in *Walden*, drawing on the myth of Zeus turning ants into people, constructs a racialized simile to say that “like pygmies we fight with cranes” (135); the evolution and stature of the human species has been reversed, according to Thoreau, and “we live meanly, like ants; though the fable tells us that we were long ago changed into men” (135). In a manner of reversal, Hawthorne’s valuation of childhood namely champions the many diminutive representations that attach to childhood; while pygmy-like in size, the child, through chiasmic inversion, nevertheless appears to hold the promise of internal greatness and metaphysical secrets. In this regard, Hawthorne may have sought to reverse the negative signification concerning his own childhood feelings of diminishment that the “manly” capabilities of his Uncle Robert had inspired in him (see Erlich 49).

Through a psychoanalytic reading, I will show how Hawthorne’s literature for and about children is influenced, or subtended, by what we might call the diminutive sublime—the way in which even small objects may be raised to what Jacques Lacan in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* calls “the dignity of the Thing” (112). The impression of even the smallest object may swell within the subject to create an overwhelming feeling that can only be called sublime. For Lacan, it is the way an object is positioned in relation to a seemingly infinite series, and not its own individual size, that determines its sublime status. In a manner of speaking, the diminutive sublime, as I understand it here, reverses the typical effect of the sublime, as, for instance, it is described in an oft-quoted passage by James Usher: “at the presence of the sublime, although it be always awful, the soul of man seems to be raised out of a trance; it assumes an unknown grandeur; it is seized with a new appetite, that in a moment effaces its former little prospects and desires; it is rapt out of sight and consideration of this diminutive world, into a kind of gigantic creation” (qtd. in Rosendale 226-27). Hawthorne seeks rather to put himself into the “diminutive world” of childhood, which

houses great “little prospects and desires.” Insofar as this process has an erotic component in Hawthorne’s literature for children, we will see how pedophilia corresponds to the inverse valuation of stature: the smaller the better.

Hawthorne conceives of childhood in relation to a vague reference to the Golden Age. This has both spatial and temporal implications for his theory of childhood that I will unpack by drawing on the apparatus of psychoanalysis, which sees the child as the gateway to the unconscious. The abstract “child” of psychoanalysis thus becomes caught up in the various metonymies that theorists since Freud have associated with birth, death, and sexuality. Hawthorne’s desire for children is paralleled by his desire of returning to innocence, as it is only in a state of vulnerability and natural, if not spiritual, ignorance that he can possibly imagine being fathomed by other men, but, at the same time, this would include the impossible task of forgetting his adult desire. Only children are capable of “full sympathy,” Hawthorne seems to suggest, but the child-like adult is someone who has gone too far “astray” of humanity (9:129), as he puts it in the short story “Little Annie’s Ramble,” and who then comes to occupy a hopeless position; striving towards childishness, in other words, concomitantly and tragically pulls us in a direction opposite, not only adulthood, but even our humanity. At play here is a regression of grand proportions linked to maturation and evolution. Hawthorne nevertheless seems to identify with the pedophilic narrator of this early story, as well as the other sad, male figures that we will encounter in this chapter; for example, in Hawthorne’s retelling of the Proserpina myth, “The Pomegranate Seeds,” rather than a tyrannical rapist, King Pluto of the underworld appears as a miserable aesthete, who is not quite suited for the world above. In this text, Hawthorne reveals a concern with orifices rather than erect structures in relation to the architecture of Hades, and this provides us with an associative link to the “cavities” of Browne’s Folly, which carries a masculine

signification as well. Additionally, it is on this point that we will come to see different connections to our previous discussions about “fundamental” preposterousness in Thoreau and Melville.

Hawthorne’s literature for and containing children gathers a host of small characters to populate his baby-house. But this is an unstable domestic space of the mind, in which relations are threatened by the presence of unruly elements. Aside from the precarious nature of the children themselves, other, non-human creatures come to disturb the representation of childhood that Hawthorne has in mind. Monkeys in particular are undesirable, and they work a preposterous influence on Hawthorne’s conception of the child in “Little Annie’s Ramble.” The “sacredness” of childhood can be negatively influenced by a plethora of external sources. But it is primarily the human world, to Hawthorne’s mind, that seeks to ensnare and pervert the child in many different ways. The burgeoning desire of reformers to formalize a mode of pedagogy in the nineteenth century appears to have troubled Hawthorne, who preferred homeschooling his children. This anti-educational impulse comes to the foreground in the short story “The Village Uncle,” which, through what I will call Hawthorne’s “salty avunculate,” imagines an intergenerational relationality beyond education and filiation. In the last two sections of this chapter, I explore the supernatural pursuit of alchemy, which, as a counterfeit of nature, becomes a potent trope for Hawthorne in his twilight years to present a confusing batch of inversions concerning gender and age.

II. Sympathy and Sodometry

In *Child-Loving*, James Kincaid identifies in nineteenth-century voices, such as Samuel Smiles and Elizabeth Blackwell, “a developmental model [...] at work, an idea of

change growing out of a ‘nucleus’ in the child” (66). This unitary model, nevertheless, Kincaid shows, is not beyond the influence of “disruptive figures” (66). Specifically, the “equation of the child with ‘change’ [...] is too simple, failing to account for the way the child can be and is slotted into a psychology and an erotics of loss” (67). There is something shadowy about childhood. The child is a metonym of an idealized form that no living creature, *stricto sensu*, can embody. Longing for childhood after it is over creates a narrative infected by what Susan Stewart calls “the social disease of nostalgia” (ix). Nostalgia engenders a “structure of desire, a structure that both invents and distances its object and thereby inscribes again and again the gap between signifier and signified that is the place of generation for the symbolic” (ix). The child is thus objectified by the narrative of nostalgia, the subject of which is the “homesick” adult, who remains caught up in the confusing direction towards a “future-past” (x).

For Martin Heidegger, homesickness equals waiting—“always waiting for something” (5). This “something” is wholeness of being; our distance from “being as a whole” brings about a certain “restlessness” (5). “We have somehow always already departed toward this whole, or better, we are always already on the way to it. But we are driven on, i.e., we are somehow simultaneously torn back by something, resting in a gravity that draws us downward” (5-6). The ground of being is ungrounded by an “oscillating to and fro[ness],” but being “underway,” at the same time, is the very essence of our being (6). Being is haunted by a hesitation in time. Even as we are moving forward we doubt our resolve. Is it possible that we have left something behind? This sense of lack, of having left something behind, belongs to the adult alone—the adult is somehow *under-determined*⁸¹ by homesickness; s/he feels the heavy burden of the past, as it is spatialized in a “downward”

⁸¹ I borrow this term from Tim Dean (“Art as Symptom” 24).

movement. The child born of Romanticism is never homesick, and as such this feeling of lack is reserved for the adult, while the child remains oblivious to its own sublimity.

In the introduction to his collection of fables and myths, *Tanglewood Tales*, published in 1853, Hawthorne represents childhood as a nostalgic remainder of a mythical age:

“Children are now the only representatives of the men and women of that happy era [the Golden Age]; and therefore it is that we must raise the intellect and fancy to the level of childhood, in order to re-create the original myths” (7:179). This mythical world-view sees childhood as the next “logical” step of the ladder towards wholeness—the unity of intellect and fancy. The child belongs to a previous time, but exists spatio-intellectually on a higher stage of development than the adult. In this instance, Hawthorne appears to be drawing on, even while re-configuring, the lesson from Matthew 18:3 that, “Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.” According to divine teleology, this particular form of “infantilism” thus constitutes a step closer to God, which is similar to Wordsworth’s sentiment in the “Intimations Ode,” as we saw above.

In *Tanglewood Tales*, Hawthorne furthermore engages with what we might call the vagaries of sublimation, as, in the original meaning, “sublimation” defined a “process of purifying by heating into a vapor” (*Barnhart*). Hawthorne worries about how the “abhorrent” stories of the “Greek Tragedians” might be “purified” in order to render them “presentable to children” (7:179, 178). Similarly, as Carol Billman reminds us (108), in the preface to *Biographical Stories for Children*, Hawthorne says that “the author regards children as sacred, and would not, for the world, cast anything into the fountain of a young heart, that might embitter or pollute its waters” (6:214). The fictional narrator of the *Tanglewood Tales* stories, Eustace Bright, appeases Hawthorne, who we are led to believe is merely the editor of the work, by assuring him that the “hideous” elements of the Greek myths “fall away, and

are thought of no more, the instant [Bright] puts his imagination in sympathy with the innocent little circle, whose wide-open eyes are fixed so eagerly upon him” (7:179). This bit of “sympathetic magic” (Taussig xiii) activates the “inherent germ” of the stories, and “[t]hus the stories [...] transform themselves, and re-assume the shapes which they might be supposed to possess in the pure childhood of the world” (Hawthorne 7:179). In this way, for example, as it appears in *Tanglewood Tales*, the retelling of the myth of Proserpina ignores the rape that is otherwise central to the original story: “No longer an abductor in any sexual sense of the word, Hawthorne’s king [Pluto] of the underworld is a lonely and not altogether wicked man who would like companionship in his dark quarters” (Billman 111). (Carol Billman briefly alludes to Pluto’s avuncular affect, which is a concept I will be developing further in my analysis of “The Village Uncle”). The mesmeric gaze of Bright’s youthful audience purifies the stories of their “Greek” element, re-inscribing them with the words of the “first poet” of the Golden Age (Hawthorne 7:179).⁸² It is as if the child in this instance absorbs what the adult has rendered unrepresentable; they purify the stories prior to their own enjoyment of them. The childish purity of the audience—who at once collaborate in their own consumption of the stories—severs the “parasitical growth” of Greek tragedy from the “original fable” (179). In other words, the purification of the tales functions to reveal Greekness as a contagion—as an un-dignified thing—but that which must be eradicated must first be *known*. Are we then to believe that the children as audience are innocent of the “objectionable characteristics” of Greek mythology? Can sympathy spring forth in the presence of ignorance?

⁸² It is interesting here to note that, according to Richard Halpern, Hegel in his *Aesthetics* purifies Greek art of its homosexual elements in order to redeem and savour its sublimity devoid of “sensual desire” (*Shakespeare’s Perfume* 8).

We can think of this cleansing form of sympathy as a “sodometry,” in the way understood by Jonathan Goldberg. In *Sodometries*, which we have had occasion to quote before, Goldberg indicates that sodometry is not merely an obsolete synonym for “sodomy,” but that it can signify as a discursive operation, by which “falseness” is uncovered (xv); a sodometry “impugn[s]” in order to purify (xv). Hawthorne and his alter-ego have already deemed Greek legends opposite “our Christianized moral-sense” (7:179), and they thus name “it” by not-naming. Dwelling outside the realm of “blessed sunshine,” the Greeks are connoisseurs of the dark side of existence—they have replaced joy with “the sternest forms of grief that ever the world saw” (179). The Greeks have it all backwards as it were, and Hawthorne is intent on naming (almost) everything “that is wrong in their behaviour” (Goldberg, *Sodometries* xv). The childish auditors of the stories host the fabulous germ of the Golden Age, and they seem unaffected by the “parasitical” Greek influence. As a result of the sympathy formed between audience and storyteller, Hawthorne’s fabulous stories undergo a re-orientation, a translation, substituting, for example, violent rapist with gentle pedophile in “The Pomegranate Seeds.” At the same time, the intercourse between Bright and his audience has the function of rendering the relationship equal in a way that adult and child usually are not. This is another way in which Greekness is relinquished from the text, as the Greek context emphasizes hierarchical structures based on age among other things. This orientation backward to the assumed origin of the fable is of course only the representation of an *assumption*—the origin is “supposed” rather than known; it is the imitation of a shadow.

Childhood is unknowable because childhood proper, understood as an innocent state, does not exist. Childhood-in-itself presupposes innocence as a fact-of-being that comes before the existence of any actual child. While we require of children that they enter the Symbolic Order, that they learn to confess themselves to and submit to the social realm—

fitting their “tongue[s] / To dialogues of business, love, or strife” (Wordsworth, “Intimations” ll. 97-98)—the Symbolic fails to account for child-being as such, other than to introduce the child to “symbolism” in the Mirror Stage, a “this-is-that” that constitutes the subject. The child created by literature can be seen to embody the form of a souvenir, which is “emblematic of the nostalgia that all narrative reveals—the longing for its place of origin” (Stewart xii). Stewart goes on to say that, “The souvenir seeks distance (the exotic in time and space), but it does so in order to expand the personal” (xii). However, the child as souvenir rather fills the gap of homesickness—the lack of that something which we cannot quite name. The child becomes a placeholder of such an absence; it *sublimates* the malaise of never being at home in the world. The sublimity of the child, in some regard, is seen to purify the perceived sickness of adulthood. The souvenir is a fetish of the original memory, in the sense that it becomes a metonym or relay point of a magical, previous time. The figure of the child functions in a similar way: it sublimates, in the sense of “lifting up,” or “elevating,” the memory as object to an ideal, purified form; or, in the case of *Tanglewood Tales*, the narrative itself—purified of its Greek, adult content—becomes the object of sublimation. Through an alchemical process of the imagination, this aerial “thing” is then solidified into a token or memento (souvenir) for the mind to apprehend.

The “nostalgic melancholy” at play here, which Hawthorne partakes in to a degree, makes of the child “an object for contemplation, for tender regret, [and sometimes] for sexual arousal” (Kincaid 67). The desire of the adult to at once nurture the development of the child and to arrest its teleological movement forward creates a self-defeating dialectics. This is why Kathryn Bond Stockton can say that, “Delay is said to be a feature of its growth: children grow by delaying their approach to the realms of sexuality, labor, and harm” (*The Queer Child* 62). The obvious problem with the ideology of delay, as we might refer to it, is,

for Stockton, that delay is fundamentally promiscuous: “It has relations with relations it stalls. (Labor relations, for example)” (62-63). There is nothing innocent about delay, in other words. The inevitability of what is being delayed is already influencing or contaminating the innocence of childhood, which suffers from a similar temporal conundrum. As Kevin Ohi puts it in *Innocence and Rapture*, “Because innocence can be posited only after its vanishing, because it is constituted by its demise, because its prior existence is produced as an effect of its later corruption, innocence can, from the perspective of dominant culture, never be sufficiently protected” (6). Delaying denotes a conscious or unconscious deferral of action or movement, while innocence can only be appreciated retrospectively. The former turns away from the future, while the latter turns eagerly towards the past; both are examples of the impossibility of fixing childhood temporality. What does this tragic temporal duality tell us about childhood ontology? “Childhood ontology” might in fact appear to us as an oxymoron, if we affirm the Heideggerian lesson that being is fundamentally a being-toward-death. What becomes of death as a *horizon* within the dual framework of delay and innocence?

Commenting on early modern conceptions of childhood—as received from William Kempe and Thomas Wright—Erica Fudge concludes that, “Like animals, children are only concerned with what is in front of them, with what is present, and not with the past or the future, or what is absent or remembered” (“Learning to Laugh” 279). Ironically, according to Fudge, their excessive presentness—the inability to conceive of temporality abstractly—is what sets children apart from the adult world. This does not mean that children are not influenced by other temporalities. The future-to-be in the form of the adult-to-come must be seen as the primary influence working upon the child in this regard. However, we can only *infer* the presence of the adult that the child is to become, and yet, despite its absence, this

future shape weighs heavily on the child. The child, in a manner of speaking, is always in the process of being made into its adult form; the child is *for* the future. But for the adult, one's own childhood is always lost somewhere in the past, and trying to inhabit it once again is like chasing a shadow. Thus the tragedy of Clifford in *The House of the Seven Gables*. Clifford, following his traumatic prison term, has regressed to "babyhood," but

The more Clifford seemed to taste the happiness of a child, the sadder was the difference to be recognized. With a mysterious and terrible Past, which had annihilated his memory, and a blank Future before him, he had only this visionary improbable Now, which, if you once look closely at it, is *nothing*. (2:149; my emphasis)

What Steven Bruhm calls "*child-defined* presence"⁸³ can only be defined, so to speak, against the absence of a clearly defined present.

III. The Unconscious Child: Meaning Reversed

The incongruity between language and the essence of childhood becomes manifest in different ways. Freud reminds us in his review of Karl Abel's "The Antithetical Sense of Primal Words" "how fond children are of playing at reversing the sound of words, and how frequently the dream-work makes use for various ends of a reversal of the material to hand for representation" (*CP* 4:190). On this basis, Freud suggests that children have access to a "deeper origin" of signification than adults (190). Or perhaps the point is rather that, as he puts it in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, "Behind [the] childhood of the individual we are

⁸³ This phrase is found in a book chapter titled "The Ghost of the Counterfeit Child," which is forthcoming in *A Companion to American Gothic* from Wiley-Blackwell, edited by Charles L. Crow; no page number.

promised a picture of a phylogenetic childhood,” upon which it follows that “the analysis of dreams will lead us to a knowledge of man’s archaic heritage, of what is psychically innate in him” (*SE* 5:548, 549). The promise of such a “picture,” however, can only ever be a hallucination, according to Freud’s own theory of regression—the transformation of thoughts into images (544). In other words, Freud, like the dreamer, is “fobbing himself off” (Hopkins 98): the dream of rendering in words the primal childhood of humanity as such must fail, and this part of his work, to borrow from James Hopkins’s commentary on *The Interpretation of Dreams*, will only bring him, and us, “a marginal kind of satisfaction” (98). As Nata Minor puts it, “Theory is there to summon man back to order and provide him with an inventory of words that temporarily put a stop to his quest” (83). In this way, Freud can be said to fetishize the child as the clearest embodiment of the unconscious; and this is thus also the point at which Hawthorne’s Golden Age vision intersects with psychoanalysis. But perhaps we can view Freud’s “dream-work,” if I may, as posing a resistance to the forward direction of modernity, by insisting on the importance of uncovering the “mental antiquities” of the human race (*SE* 5:549). For our purposes, this is the true value of Freud’s theory. In what follows, I will further elaborate on the different theories concerning childhood that come to us from psychoanalysis, as this will prove helpful in dealing with the many confusions emanating from Hawthorne’s narratives of childhood.

The origin of primal words is split into a confusion of meanings, and the infantile understanding of an unconscious, “original” language might then produce different and *conscious* “childish confusions” that will affect how children come to conceive of, for

example, procreation in the oedipal stage—namely, variously, “that babies are conceived orally, anally, and through the navel” (Leclaire, *A Child Is Being Killed* 7). Specifically the navel appears as a central metaphor in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. The “dream’s navel,” Freud says, is “the spot where it reaches down into the unknown” (SE 5:525); this is the “*underdetermination*” of the subject, that which “the signifier [cannot] accommodate” (Dean, “Art as Symptom” 24). Homesickness, as we saw above, fits within this parameter. In her recent commentary on Freud’s work, Danish psychoanalyst Judy Gammelgaard states that the metaphor of the navel recalls, on the one hand, a *heimlich* recognition of the navel as a site of comfort, the physical attachment to the mother, but, on the other hand, the navel is *unheimlich* in that it, abyss-like, signifies as a certain point of unknowability (*Det Taler [It Speaks]* 214). The negative prefix *un-* signals the irony at play here, in that the navel is both the site of original trauma and the greatest sense of familiarity. The confusing aspect of the navel—as a figure both of wounding and birth—can point differently to regression and reproduction, and it seems significant and appropriate that Freud should evoke this particular anatomical indentation to talk about the vagaries of the unconscious. The language of the unconscious leads to a proliferation of preposterous metonymies, which specifically confuse different orifices (and mock-orifices such as the navel)—not only anus for vagina in relation to sodomy, but, in this instance, the reproductive confusion comes to center on the navel. We are thus reminded of the fact that the “idea [not necessarily the act] of sodomy as backward, inverted, and preposterous carries with it the sense of things being not simply out of place or out of order, but out of control” (McFarlane 35); in other words, the preposterous threatens “to instigate disorder’s spread” (35).

In turn, this leads us to deem, with Lacan, that the unconscious is surface-like rather than depth-oriented (see Dean, “Art as Symptom” 27-8): the horizontal, associative “spread”

of unconscious significations is prior to any order that the preposterous can be said to influence and disrupt; in a certain dizzying sense, therefore, the unconscious is pre-preposterous, and what we term “disorder’s spread” is anachronistically applied to describe the processes of the unconscious. For example, in the *Interpretation* Freud has occasion to relate the “infantile material” of a particular dream in which a male patient, according to Freud, confuses the “red flesh” of a woman’s lower eyelids with the “gaping,” “‘proud flesh’” of a vagina, as seen in childhood (*SE* 4:201). (Of course, as Freud a few pages earlier asserted, “the sources of [a] dream’s latent content” are more often than not provided by repressed childhood experiences [198]). The fleshiness of the vagina is at least as important here as the “gaping” void.

As we have noted before, depth and surface are not necessarily antithetical entities; they may even be combined in a single preposterous tableau. In “The Pomegranate Seeds,” Hawthorne’s re-telling of the myth of Proserpina, Pluto and his underground palace are presented in distinctly preposterous terms: the river Lethe, which borders his abode, “reflect[s] no images of anything that was on the banks; and it move[s] as sluggishly *as if it had quite forgotten which way it ought to flow*” (7:304; my emphasis). The flow of water traditionally appears as a symbol of regeneration, but, in this case, the river of the underworld is quite suitably depicted in terms that indicate a reversal of (re)productivity. Expressing a sense of “moral obligation” (*OED*), “ought,” to the extent that it points to a lack of propriety, appears as a specific signifier of queerness in Hawthorne.⁸⁴ The river Lethe flows in a direction that appears to be contrary to what is proper, thus exposing the queer, preposterous circumstance of Pluto’s underground domain. Proserpina finds the sight “dismal” (304), while it entirely “suits [Pluto’s] taste” (304). Proserpina’s mouth, “that little red cave” (325),

⁸⁴ Recall, for example, that “something [which] *ought* not to be left prominent” but that is nonetheless exposed in Westervelt’s eyes in *The Blithedale Romance* (3:92).

stands in stark contrast to “the gloomy cavern” that marks the entrance to Pluto’s lair, through which she is abducted (311). The two “caverns” are nonetheless connected. The “hole” in the ground leading to Pluto’s palace keeps “spreading wider and wider, and growing deeper and deeper, until it really seem[s] to have no bottom” (299); like Walden Pond, it appears, on first sight, unfathomable. The depth of the passageway acts as an ironic counterpoint to Pluto’s “superficial” tastes: “‘Ah, this twilight is truly refreshing,’” Pluto intones to Proserpina, “‘after being so tormented with that ugly and impertinent glare of the sun! How much more agreeable is lamplight or torchlight, more particularly when reflected from diamonds!’” (302-03). Pluto’s “hole” is obviously rectal in scope, and the allusion to the anal orifice further helps Hawthorne paint him in sodomitical hues. The pomegranate fruit has a mythological connection to the underworld (see Ruggaber 143), and this “wizened” fruit is finally what solidifies the link between the two orifices: the earthy entranceway to Pluto’s lair and Proserpina’s mouth, the teeth and lips of which, as if by magic, appear to operate “of their own accord,” as the pomegranate fruit enters the “neighbourhood of her mouth” (Hawthorne 7:325). Ingesting the pomegranate seeds seals her fate of having to spend six months of every year in Pluto’s company (one for each seed she has consumed [328]); neither of light or darkness, she becomes, not unwillingly (329), a creature of the in-between, bridging the reproductive connotation of her mother, Ceres, and the anality of Pluto. She is neither adult nor quite child; she cannot fulfill either role adequately.

That eyes, or the flesh surrounding them, can figure as the displaced material of other orifices has previously been affirmed. We will remember, in Chapter 1, that Thoreau likens the shores of Walden Pond to human lips, which, in turn, enter into a tripartite metonymical sequence together with the mouth and the anus (see page 103 above). This does not

necessarily lead to an uncanny effect; and neither are we necessarily dealing with something as banal (and heterocentrist) as a womb-fantasy (see Freud, *CP* 4:403). It is rather Thoreau's point that a home-like sensation can just as easily be produced *because of* as *despite* different confusions. As a further point of connection, in the previous chapter we had occasion to comment on Melville's chimney in the language of architecture as concerns the notion of the *poche*, for example. In the same way as the hollow of the chimney can be said to figure as a "pocket" in the text, the navel might serve a similar function in psychoanalysis (a navel might also protrude from the body). If the womb is the physical place of the unborn child, the navel is the site of the unconscious child of the dream. The child is like a pocket of the unconscious turned inside out, revealing the confusions that inhabit it. We thus see a spatial order emerging that includes the contiguous relations between navel, womb, wound, mouth and eye. The child travels between these different sites—surfaces and disappears—and the primary wish of the dreamer would be to combine all four into a (w)hole. Such childish confusions, as we have named them, might therefore dissolve the negative affects associated with a feeling of homesickness.

Hawthorne's fiction for children, then, appears to celebrate fragmentation as an aesthetic ideal, which resonates with "[t]he variety of references and metamorphic faculties that Hawthorne finds in language," as it "can furnish refuge from the fixity of identity produced by family names" (Brown 100). In order to set himself apart from his Puritan ancestors, Hawthorne famously changed the spelling of his name. Gillian Brown notes that,

By distinguishing his name from the Hathorn family, Hawthorne also sought to make himself, like children in the nineteenth-century ideal, independent of ancestral inheritance. Giving explicitly allegorical names both to his own daughters—Una and

Rose—and to his fictional children, he accented the range of association that individuals can realize through their names. (100)

This associative structure renders their origin uncertain, while at the same time allowing Hawthorne a certain artistic freedom regarding the kind of figural connections he would be able to involve his child characters in—as well as himself.

Emerson celebrates the child's voice in "Self-Reliance": "Do not think the youth has no force because he cannot speak to you and me. Hark! in the next room his voice is sufficiently clear and emphatic. It seems he knows how to speak to his contemporaries" (2:29). The language of children remains to be domesticated by the Symbolic, which includes the repression of the anatomical confusions that—part stammer, part private code—constitute the "special" language of children, according to Laurence Rickels (*Aberrations of Mourning* 39). Could this division be what leads Hawthorne's daughter, Una, to ask her father where the place of "'little Julian'" is on the page he is writing, as if she were aware of the displacing power of words (8:403)? One of the ways in which the Hawthorne children come to "matter for their father is as a subject of writing" (Sánchez-Eppler 159); however, by scribbling "in the pages of [Hawthorne's] notebook," they inscribe themselves into his work, and their "wildly wielding pens" disrupt the orderly writing system of the adult (159). Sometimes Hawthorne even reports on his children's neologisms, such as Una's catachrestic "Wind-Turn" and "Lighting-Catch" "for weathercock and lighting-rod," respectively (8:280; as a weathercock will not necessarily resemble a rooster, this can of course be considered a catachresis in itself. Paradoxically, in this case, Una's very logical designations make the

thing itself seem less “real”). Sánchez-Eppler claims that the “mirroring of child and writing” is integral to Hawthorne’s “meaning of authorship” (159), but the child furthermore signifies as a “beyond” of the letter on the page, and this is not any less central to Hawthorne’s writing.

While Freud felt unable to divide the psychological dimension of children into strictly conscious or unconscious mental processes (see Kincaid 64), we can stipulate that childhood language draws on the *Schriftsystem* of the unconscious (see Ronell 14), and that it articulates otherwise inaccessible “dream-thoughts,” or wishes, that Freud in the *Interpretation* would refer to as the “condensed” elements of the dream, which bear comparison to the hieroglyphics of ancient Egypt.⁸⁵ As Hawthorne locates the child’s knowledge of the Golden Age in an airy, indeterminate sphere, we should see this as a metaphor for the unconscious processes that forever escape the apprehension of the adult subject; the spatial displacements of above and below that we locate in Hawthorne’s authorship may be considered as metaphors of the collective “beyond” of consciousness. Here we must make a careful distinction between any actual child and the child of the unconscious, as it were. The child “inside the dreamer” (Stockton 160) appears like a species of homunculus⁸⁶ floating in the primordial ooze of the unconscious as the amalgamation of

⁸⁵ It is no wonder that Wilde’s narrator in *The Portrait of Mr. W.H.* should believe that “a scroll of yellow papyrus covered with strange characters” could tell him something about the “mysteries of passion” of his “secret soul” (qtd. in Halpern, *Shakespeare’s Perfume* 49).

⁸⁶ The allegorical figure of the homunculus has a long tradition in different world literatures and the sciences. As with Goethe’s Homunculus of *Faust*, the homuncular “creature” of the unconscious is contained within its milieu, and yet asserts a great deal of influence on the ego. Albert Scholz has pointed out that Goethe’s Homunculus desires to break free from, or rise out of (*zu entstehen*), his glass container to join with the four elements (27), and this provides us with an apt metaphor by which to describe the child within the dreamer. Curiously, Freud at one point likened the ego to the image of the “cortical homunculus” of neuroscience. “If we wish,” he writes in “The Ego and the Id,” the ego can be identified “with the ‘cortical homunculus’ of the anatomists, which stands on its head in the cortex, sticks up its heels, faces backwards, and as we know, has its speech-area on the left hand side” (*SE* 19:26). As the cortical homunculus of a child would appear different from that of an adult, since different organs and limbs will take on a lesser or greater significance as the human subject matures, and hence appear larger or smaller in the body-image of the brain, when we refer to the child inside the dreamer, we have to picture a version of the body-image as it would have “appeared” to the dreamer

early childhood affects that are lost to conscious memory. Indeed, Freud avers time and time again in his work that the unconscious is fundamentally infantile in nature; in *A Case of Obsessional Neurosis*, he goes so far as to say that “[t]he unconscious [is] the infantile” (*SE* 10:177).

While, in the Freudian understanding, the unconscious is a-temporal,⁸⁷ “the dream,” according to Kathryn Bond Stockton, “is a backward birth, a ‘peculiar’ ‘re-production’ of childhood motives that cause the dream” (160). This is in line with Freud’s “hypothetical mental apparatus” (*SE* 5:543), in which the direction of psychical processes during dreaming is postulated to take on a “‘regressive’ character” (542); that is, since “[t]he infantile scene is unable to bring about its own revival [it must] be content with returning as a dream” (546). According to Freud, in dreams, “The present tense is the one in which wishes are represented as fulfilled” (535). Does this mean that the child inside the dreamer effects a “conversion” of the “perhaps”—the “expectation” of future fulfillment—that otherwise governs the unconscious wish of the dreamer (534)? The word “conversion” itself prompts a series of further questions, regarding the directionality of the “perhaps.” As Jonathan Goldberg muses, “What is a conversion? Is it, as the etymology of the word suggests, a turn with? Or is it a turning around? Or back? Does it represent a break? An end? A beginning?” (*Seeds of Things* 8). Leaving these questions suspended for now, we will note that the child, or the homuncular presence in the unconscious, represents the desire for what we might call the primal presentness of mother and child. And, on this point, we can thus agree with Avital

as a child taking the place of that current to the adult; but this, of course, can only appear as an hallucination of the original body-image.

⁸⁷ In any discussion of the unconscious one must conform to the position that, as Erin Felicia Labbie puts it, “Either the unconscious exists, and it has always existed, or it does not exist and it has never existed” (4). There can be no middle-road. Psychoanalysis obviously adheres to the first pronouncement. Be that as it may, as Labbie goes on to remark, “this is not to say that the unconscious is always structured in precisely the same manner; it is, however, to say that language determines subjective knowledge and this, in turn, affects our understanding of the knowable and articulable elements in the world” (7).

Ronell when she says that, “The dream descends from the past *in every sense*” (43). The past, to the extent that it is repeatable, inflects the universal present tense of dreams equally. In the final paragraph of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud says: “By picturing our wishes as fulfilled, dreams are after all leading us into the future. But this future, which the dreamer represents as the present, has been moulded [sic] by his indestructible wish into a perfect likeness of the past” (*SE* 5:621).

In this way, past and future are condensed into one single, present tense. We can thus substantiate Stockton’s point by asserting that the dream drives the ego backward into the only sense of wholeness (however fantasized) ever achieved by the human being—that which existed before the binary of subject and object came to structure the child’s experience of the world. As such, the dream attempts to do away with the Imaginary and Symbolic registers of the subject; the unconscious drive of the dream strives to relinquish the asymptotic relationship between subject and desire that is constitutive of the Mirror Stage, according to Lacan.⁸⁸ For Freud, then, “*we find the child and the child’s impulses still living on in the dream*” (*SE* 4:191). The psychical apparatus can safely relegate such impulses to the dream-space of the unconscious, since, James Hopkins notes, “the role of wishes is not to produce actions, but rather to be related to imaginings or other expressions, [and] we do not require that wishes be reasonable, sensible, or consistent” (98).

IV. Constructing Hawthorne’s Child-Scapes

⁸⁸ Lacan’s theory of the Mirror Stage namely seeks to account for the child’s entrance into reality as such: “this form [mirror stage] situates the agency known as the ego, prior to its social determination, in a fictional direction that will forever remain irreducible for any single individual or, rather, that will only asymptotically approach the subject’s becoming” (*Écrits* 76).

The drive backward is a movement, in reverse, towards *Aufhebung* between child and adult—the transmutation of interior *potential* with exterior *actuality*—that we can only approach in dreaming or art. This is what is at stake for Eustace Bright in *Tanglewood Tales*. The wish to activate one’s interior potential to inhabit childhood once more lies at the root of Hawthorne’s thought: “Youth, however eclipsed for a season, is undoubtedly the proper, permanent, and genuine condition of man” (13:463). The search for such “genuineness” is what drives the construction of imaginary child-adult spaces. Hawthorne’s biographer, Edwin Haviland Miller, makes the Freudian point that “fiction is a child’s world—or child-scape—in which the macrocosm is viewed from the perspective of the suffering, victimized child” (37)—as in “The Gentle Boy,” for example, in which the central child character is assaulted and traumatized by neighborhood hoodlums. The Hawthornian “child-scape” is made up of “screened recollections and perceptions influenced by later events, failed dreams, and disappointed desires” (37)—and we should count the failure of his collaboration with Longfellow here. I will contend, however, that the child-scapes of Hawthorne’s fiction depend predominantly on childish confusions, as we understand these through the lens of psychoanalysis. The point is not to psychoanalyze Hawthorne, or his texts for that matter, but rather to explore how the notion of the child-scape might in some way represent an ideal form of enjoyment that, however, is distorted by a variety of confusions that we provisionally can call preposterous.

In the process, this gives way to a fantasized notion of childhood as a site of unbounded enjoyment. It is exactly this that keeps adults “interested” in children, as it were: the child represents an “exception” to the limits of the adult world, the idea that the child has access to a kind of enjoyment that is infinitely better and more satisfying than we could ever

imagine.⁸⁹ This corresponds to what Bruce Fink refers to as “unfailing *jouissance*”—“the idea of a *jouissance* that never fails” (“Knowledge and *Jouissance*” 35). Referencing Lacan, Fink points out that this “other” enjoyment “*insists* as an ideal,” the content of which “ex-sists”—meaning that “it persists and makes its claims felt with a certain insistence from the outside” (35). It takes language to articulate this felt inadequacy, but language cannot contain the “otherness” of this enjoyment, or ultimate norm of satisfaction, that we sense is lurking just beyond the limits of our Symbolic reality. The “wild” scribbling of Hawthorne’s children can serve as a metaphor of this ex-sisting “strangeness” that troubles and unsettles language itself (see Barnard, “Tongues of Angels: Feminine Structure and Other *Jouissance*” 171). Unfailing *jouissance* is precarious in two different ways: on the one hand, the idea of a perfect enjoyment “never fails to diminish still further the little *jouissance* we already have” (Fink, “Knowledge and *Jouissance*” 36); on the other hand, due to the fact that it is unsymbolizable as such, it can only “figure” by way of a proxy or representative. The meaning of *jouissance* is of course split between disgust and fascination—it is overwhelming in its “fullness” (see Fink, *The Lacanian Subject* xii). Hawthorne, however, is namely interested in “diminishment” and “little” enjoyment, as it were, but the diminutive world of children can sometimes be overwhelming, nevertheless. The archetype of the “evil child” would then represent the precariousness of childhood *jouissance*—the other side of the innocent child which reminds us that repulsion is the inverse of attraction. To use Hawthorne’s words, this would constitute the “Greekness” of the child.

⁸⁹ In Lacanian psychoanalysis this is referred to as the “feminine” structure as opposed to phallic, “masculine” *jouissance*. As Bruce Fink explains, “what Lacan calls masculine structure and feminine structure do not have to do with one’s biological organs but rather with the kind of *jouissance* that one is able to obtain” (“Knowledge and *Jouissance*” 36). The child would in this instance fall under the feminine structure, while the adult, regardless of gender, would inhabit the masculine structure, which is fundamentally disappointing, and can only lead to “partial” fulfillment. I put partial in scare quotes since it refers to the partial object that Lacan calls object *a*. Without going into too much detail, we could say that, very generally speaking, the kind of enjoyment we look for in a child is based on those features that signal its innocence. The child itself, insofar as it is idealized, does not depend on partial objects for its enjoyment.

The asymmetrical relation between attraction and repulsion can figure as a threat or evil, and we see this embodied in “The Gentle Boy,” as Ibrahim, the orphaned Quaker boy, is assaulted by a pack of vicious, “unbreeched fanatics” (9:92), in whom Hawthorne finds a *too* wild contrast to the breeched Sweet Fern of *Tanglewood Tales*. The “baby-fiends” beat Ibrahim with sticks and “pelt[] him with stones” (92). The child-scape of “The Gentle Boy” thus stages a tension between the Calvinist conception of “infantile depravity” and nineteenth-century “Romantic and idealized images of childhood” (Sánchez-Eppler 145). At the same time, however, it reveals a thread of what Luther S. Luedtke has called the “Oriental patterns” of Hawthorne’s *oeuvre*, which encompasses “the tension of the foreign and the domestic” (xxii). In *Nathaniel Hawthorne and the Romance of the Orient*, Luedtke notes how the Puritan world of moral rectitude is at odds with Ibrahim’s “oriental” tenderness (see 102), and the attack on him by the other boys is confused by a dialectic of disgust and desire. Cameron McFarlane has pointed out that sodomy, historically, is “repeatedly represented as coming from elsewhere, a kind of foreign infection erupting within the social body, but the source of which is definitely outside of that body” (55). This specific discursive strain within the wider discourse on sodomy is influenced by “a xenophobia directed particularly toward the Catholic countries of France and Italy” (55);⁹⁰ however, Turkey, as McFarlane makes clear (58), is implicated in the threat of the sodomite, a foreign creature that within the binary of natural/unnatural, foreign/domestic “becomes a substitute alien—so like the enemy—reproducing internally foreign corruption and danger as domestic perversion and deviance” (58). Perhaps this can account for the fact that Hawthorne

⁹⁰ In his own time, Hawthorne found inhospitable the tendency of Protestant churches to keep their doors locked during the week, and Gilbert P. Voigt points out that Hawthorne for this reason appreciated the general hospitality of the Catholic churches he visited in Europe (see Voigt 395). On this basis, he considered himself “half a Catholic,” as he puts it in *The French and Italian Notebooks* (14:552); however, Hawthorne’s attitude towards Catholicism was less than unambiguous, and on the same page he appears to compare the religion to “[d]espotism” (552).

might initially have envisioned the attack on Ibrahim as having a sexual nature. Hawthorne, however, was careful not to offend his middleclass readership, and, as a result, as James R. Mellow points out, he “deleted a remark in ‘The Gentle Boy’ which indicated that [...] Ibrahim, had been struck ‘in a tender part’ when he was assaulted by the neighborhood children” (77-78). We might say that Hawthorne had already rendered Ibrahim rather *queer* by his “slender” form, “the eyes that seem[] to mingle with the moonlight, the sweet, airy voice, and the outlandish name” (71, 72); as such, perhaps Hawthorne felt that the final sexual connotation was unnecessary and too troubling to include. The deviancy of the malicious Puritan children is hardly suppressed in the story, nevertheless, and Ibrahim’s orientalism is ostensibly what brings about the preposterous in this tale, as a reversal of foreign/domestic, natural/unnatural.

Foreignness is something that can be installed in the child. In “The Gentle Boy,” the influence of the protagonist’s parents is what creates in Ibrahim a “disordered imagination”—a “foreignness” within the self (see Rickels, *Aberrations of Mourning* 37)—which corresponds to a “certain unhealthiness” in the child (Hawthorne 9:88). On this account, it is interesting to observe that the boy’s “decorous demeanor,” as a “person of matured taste” (79), becomes subject to a certain volatility due to “the flightiness of his mirth,” which offends against “decorum” (89). The character of Ibrahim seems to have been born out of a fragment attached to Hawthorne’s notebook, in which, inspired by “Scottish superstition,” he conceives of “a child’s giving himself up to fancy, and dwelling in a sort of Fairy land, till he becomes unfit for realities” (8:554). Ibrahim lacks “the stamina of self-support” (9:89), and he is subject to bipolar moods. Ibrahim is an asymmetrical character—he is “like a domesticated sunbeam” (89)—and he is caught between the severity of Puritan society and his “pagan” origins (Ibrahim was born in Turkey; 88). As an apparent result of

his “barbaric birthplace” (91), the fairy tales that Ibrahim narrates to a convalescing neighborhood boy are “monstrous, disjointed, and without aim,” but, at the same time, they are tender, “like a sweet, familiar face, encountered in the midst of wild and unearthly scenery” (91). The object of Ibrahim’s stories is not of this world, and they speak of an enjoyment beyond the comprehension of Puritanism.

Ibrahim must finally perish, however. The innermost child that the childlike adult fetishizes is a “knowing” child, which will be birthed (only to be killed, mind you) by the knowingly childlike reader. From this death, then, emerges the scandalous child of queer theory, which is situated, structurally, prior to the demand to reproduce, prior to the pleasure principle. As Ohi formulates it, “The scandal of the child [...] is not that children do ‘it,’ want ‘it,’ or think about ‘it,’ but that they unsettle assumptions about what ‘it’ is, make sexuality in general veer away from reproduction to a generalizable perversion” (5). The queer child thus resists and subverts what Freud called the “narcissistic system” of paternal love, which requires that the child “fulfill those wishful dreams of the parents which they never carried out, to become a great man and a hero in his father’s stead, or to marry a prince as a tardy compensation to the mother” (*CP* 4:48). In the same way, Ibrahim does not manage to form a bridge between Hawthorne’s Puritanism and his “wilder” inclinations.

I have so far alluded briefly to a number of Hawthorne’s texts dealing with childhood. In the three major sections to follow, I will offer more substantial readings of “Little Annie’s Ramble,” “The Village Uncle,” and the incomplete novel *The Dolliver Romance*. Karen Sánchez-Eppler has suggested that, in the context of Hawthorne, to write for children

requires an understanding of the “youthful heart,” which does not respond either to “bewildering difficulties” or “repulsive chronological brevity” (149). The “childish” language of the artist is necessarily a syntax of the middle ground, which we can understand in terms of Hawthorne’s own theory of romance. Hawthorne famously defines romance as a “neutral territory, somewhere between the real world and fairy-land,” in “The Custom-House” (1:36), which frames *The Scarlet Letter*. The neutral, or middle, ground of romance, illuminated by the “unobtrusive tinge” of “dim coal-fire” and the “cold spirituality of [moonlight],” is neither internal nor external to either “the Actual” or “the Imaginary” (36); it is rather an in-between space that allows for the re-negotiation of binaries. In fact, Samuel Chase Coale points out that Hawthorne “may begin several of his short stories and romances as allegories,” but

the outlines of an initial rigid dualism or polarity—Dimmesdale vs. Chillingworth, Coverdale vs. Hollingsworth, Hester vs. Puritan Boston, female vs. male [and child vs. adult, we may add]—begin to merge and become entangled with one another, so that the result is far more complicated and labyrinthine than the original allegorical signs at first glance would suggest. (2)

In this way, we can understand Hawthorne’s “middle way” of “saying neither yea nor nay” (Miller xiv) as a screen through which, variously, progressive and regressive desires may pass, progressing towards an attractive—as opposed to repulsive—chronological complexity.⁹¹ Rather than producing a dialectic of the Actual and the Imaginary, childhood is finally more enigmatic.

⁹¹ Here we might cite Gloria C. Erlich’s assertion that Hollingsworth in *The Blithedale Romance* serves as a metonymic relay-point between different characters from Hawthorne’s own life, such as his uncle Robert Manning (130).

While, as we saw above, children can freely pass between different extremes (“deep” or “high”), we must reconfigure or modify the measured, middle ground of the adult, in order to conceive of child-being, insofar as this is possible. Thus, Hawthorne’s prose filters past desires into an imaginative relation between child and adult that is influenced by a futural wish to abolish the middle ground that must nevertheless remain unfulfilled. At the same time, the complexities and confusions that abound in Hawthorne’s child-scapes must be understood as a process of sublimation, which, fundamentally, relies on the “exchange” and “substitution of objects” (Goebel 124). In “Creative Writers and Day-dreaming,” Freud explains what is at stake here:

As people grow up, then, they cease to play, and they seem to give up the yield of pleasure which they gained from playing. But whoever understands the human mind knows that hardly anything is harder for a man than to give up a pleasure which he has once experienced. Actually, we can never give anything up; we only exchange one thing for another. What appears to be a renunciation is really the formation of a substitute or surrogate. (*SE* 9:145)

In this way, as Eckart Goebel points out, “‘Maturity’ is an amalgam of experience” (125) and a diminished propensity for playfulness, the drive behind which is simply(!) diverted into other activities that are more socially acceptable. To the extent that sublimation deals in “substitute-formation,” each sublimated object can be understood as a symptom of the pleasure that sublimation works to divert, resulting in “surrogate satisfaction” (Dean, “Art as Symptom” 28). The unfulfilled drive towards pleasure exchanges the forbidden or improper object of desire with another, a placeholder for the excess of libidinal energy that sublimation creates.

In order to avoid confusion, at this point I will focus on the fact that sublimation “purifies,” while “simultaneously exud[ing] a remainder” (Halpern 49). The remainder of sublimation, in the case of the creative writer, as Freud alludes to in the same text, is a certain childishness, and Freud in fact indirectly, or in reverse, infantilizes the writer when he says that “every child at play behaves like a creative writer, in that he creates a world of his own, or, rather, re-arranges the things of his world in a new way that pleases him” (*SE* 9:143-44). The transformation from play to reality means for Freud the entrance into fantasy.⁹² Play, as opposed to fantasy, links “imagined objects and situations to the tangible and visible things of the real world” (144); fantasy, on the other hand, “builds castles in the air and creates what are called *day-dreams*” (145). As we grow up we might therefore, paradoxically, experience a greater degree of separation from the real world. The return to play, while potentially shameful (145), and the implied return to childhood are in a way, then, a desire for more reality. This explains how, for Wordsworth, the “shadowy recollections” of childhood “Are yet the fountain-light of all our day, / Are yet a master-light of all our seeing” (“Intimations” ll. 153, 155-56). Fantasizing about childhood is the expression of the desire to be free of adult fantasies. This is the reverse of the child “playing at being ‘grown up’” (*SE* 9:146), as the adult, driven by nostalgia, longs for a lost, past diminutiveness. The regression that follows this childish wish is hence supposed to find a sense of fulfillment in the creative work (151). Freud considers his own pattern of fantasy—1. Present wish; 2. Memory of earlier experience; 3. Future fulfillment of wish (147)—to be “too exiguous” (151), meaning,

⁹² In German, “fantasy” is spelled *Phantasie*, but unlike in English (and French), as Jean-Bertrand Pontalis and Jean Laplanche explain, it does not carry the unfortunate connotation of “whimsy,” which is why some English and American psychoanalysts have preferred to adopt the spelling “phantasy” (315). There is no terminological difference, and I have opted for the less complicated “fantasy,” following Žižek, Edelman, and others. Regardless of spelling, fantasy in psychoanalysis is not necessarily opposed to reality, and in general we can say that a fantasy is an imaginary construct—understood as the identificatory relationship between self and other(s)—that structures reality, and fantasies are largely “script” oriented (see Pontalis and Laplanche 318). Even daydreams, in Freud’s understanding, bear a relation to reality in the form of unfulfilled wishes. In Žižek’s post-Lacanian model, fantasy has more or less become synonymous with ideology.

“too diminutive,” when translated to the sphere of creative writing. Perhaps this is because the creative work, basically, is considered a part-fantasy, in that the piece of writing, “like a day-dream, is a continuation of, and a *substitutue for*, what was once the play of childhood” (152; my emphasis).⁹³ The creative work sublimates the regressive wish of returning to childhood, but as a mere *substitute for* “child’s play,” it cannot encompass the remainder, or excess, that figures in the text as childhood *jouissance*. This view is ultimately ironic, however, as Elizabeth Grosz argues via Freud, “insofar as even in infancy, there is no originary or real object: the very ‘first’ object is already a deflection or substitution for an impossible and retrospectively constructed intrauterine plenum” (“The Strange Detours of Sublimation” 143); this also accounts for the confused ordering of Freud’s fantasy schema quoted above: present—past—future (the past once again intrudes upon the circularity of the ego). From first to last, each object appears as a “corporeal surrogate” (Dean, “Art as Symptom” 27) of the unrepresentable plenum that constitutes our primal fantasies—or, put succinctly, what Lacan calls the Real. For Hawthorne, the way a physical object is lit will determine the degree to which it coheres with the spatio-temporal circumstance of the present; especially, moonlight comes to serve as the sublimating force of fantasy in his writing. Ordinary objects, he says, “become things of intellect,” are “spiritualized,” “by the unusual light [of the moon],” but this, at the same time, is how they “acquire dignity” (1:35). “A child’s shoe; the doll, seated in her little wicker carriage; the hobby-horse;—whatever, in a word, has been used or played with, during the day, is now invested with a quality of strangeness and remoteness” (35). The small size of the objects, all connected to childhood, further exaggerates the sense of “remoteness” that is constitutive of romance for Hawthorne.

⁹³ The writer’s fantasy, Freud argues, in turn, is but a synecdoche of a larger fantasy, that of myth: “it is extremely probable that myths [...] are distorted vestiges of the wishful phantasies of whole nations, the *secular dreams* of youthful humanity” (SE 9:152).

Moreover, this is the point at which we must re-evaluate our theory of sublimation, insofar as this, according to Lacan, can mean “rais[ing] an object [...] to the dignity of the Thing” (*The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* 112). While we have alluded to the workings of sublimation previously, so far we have not made a strict distinction between a Freudian and Lacanian understanding of the term. Richard Halpern helpfully and succinctly summarizes the difference as follows: “While Freudian sublimation deflects the drive from a sexual to a nonsexual aim, Lacanian sublimation removes the object of the drive from the system of aims (*Ziele*) entirely, placing it instead at that empty gravitational center which is the Thing” (88). This object is therefore organ-less; it is removed from the “organic process” of sexuality (Laplanche and Pontalis 22). For Lacan, then, “the Thing is situated in the relationship that places man in the mediating function between the real and the signifier” (*The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* 129). And he goes on:

This Thing, all forms of which created by man belong to the sphere of sublimation, this Thing will always be represented by emptiness, precisely because it cannot be represented by anything else – or, more exactly, because it can only be represented by something else. But in every form of sublimation, emptiness is determinative. (129-30)

While the Thing is unrepresentable, Lacan nevertheless proposes a material example by which to understand how the Thing comes to bear on reality—that of Jacques Prévert’s collection of empty matchboxes. From the way that they are interlocked, “so as to form a continuous ribbon that [runs] along the mantelpiece, climb[s] the wall, extend[s] to the molding, and climb[s] down again next to a door” (114), the matchboxes create “a (potentially) infinite but pointless series,” in Halpern’s words (88). In this constellation, the matchboxes point to something beyond their function as simple containers, and this

“something” is the Thing. Lacanian sublimation thus “pushes Kantian purposelessness to its surrealist limit” (89); indeed, as Halpern rightly points out, sublimation, in this case, has much to do with the concept of the sublime (89).

Interestingly, the Thing can most clearly appear to us in the form of an “imposing multiplicity” (Lacan, *Ethics* 114), as in the example of the matchboxes, which intrude on our sensory reality through their “copulatory force” (114). Following this, were we to line up every child character of Hawthorne’s *oeuvre*—not excluding his own children—strung along, like a human centipede, without discernible beginning or end, joined together by the “copulatory force” of their procession, would we then have access to something like the ultimate thingness of Hawthornian childhood? The Child as Thing (which is why I see fit to capitalize it) is surrounded by what Lacan, following Freud’s drive-theory, calls a “network of *Ziele* [aims]” (112). In this way, Hawthorne’s fictional children—Pearl, Priscilla, Little Annie, Ibrahim, Pansie, to mention but a few—and his own real children as they figure in his writing—Una, Julian, and Rose—as objects of desire take the place of the ideal Child, which can only figure in the text as a void. Each child is relayed by a number of signifiers that all stand in a centrifugal, yet asymptotic, relation to the place of the ineffable Child-Thing. We can thus speculate that the strangeness of the childhood objects that Hawthorne calls attention to in “The Custom-House” text are imbued with a foreign quality even prior to being bathed in the “unusual light” of the moon, from simply having been put into relation with children themselves.

V. Small and Big Appetites: Childish and Bestial Desires in “Little Annie’s Ramble”

Authorship for Hawthorne, according to Karen Sánchez-Eppler, to a large degree depended on making public “on the streets of the town or the pages of a book his connection with childhood” (143). This connection sometimes expressed itself in childlike activities, and, as Edwin Haviland Miller relates, “[Hawthorne’s] own children remembered him climbing trees or sliding on the ice in front of St. Paul’s in Rome” (xvi). His heir, Julian Hawthorne, recalls “a splendid holiday [of going nutting],” and the children could not “remember when their father was not their playmate, or when they ever desired or imagined any other playmate than he” (397). Hawthorne’s “childishness” in turn “provides important insights into his conception of authorship” (Sánchez-Eppler 143). However, another look at Hawthorne’s biography reveals that he was not always eager to connect directly his public author-self with a strong attachment to childhood. Indeed, Hawthorne published his early tales for children, including “The Gentle Boy” and “Little Annie’s Ramble,” anonymously.⁹⁴

“Little Annie’s Ramble” was first published in 1835 in the annual *Youth’s Keepsake, a Christmas and New Year’s Gift for Young People*. It would later appear in Hawthorne’s collection of stories, *Twice-Told Tales*. At age 31, Hawthorne was still unmarried and without children. The absence of fatherhood is perhaps what leads Miller in his biography to suggest that the story “is a lovely example of wish-fulfillment” (118), evoking the “lighter side of Hawthorne’s genius” (506), which allows him to indulge in a fantasy as

⁹⁴ Erlich traces Hawthorne’s habit of publishing his early stories anonymously or under pseudonyms to his fear of “situations in which he would be tested by others” (49). This fear, Erlich argues, Hawthorne cultivated in response to Uncle Robert’s severe attitude towards his young nephew.

“simultaneously father and the five-year old child Annie” (118).⁹⁵ Perhaps this fantasy in some way derives from the belief held by Evangelicals in early America that, as Phillip Greven puts it, “Becoming children of God not only implied the re-breaking of their wills but also a return to the first years of life in which boys and girls were both perceived as feminine” (125).⁹⁶ Miller as well as James R. Mellow’s later biographical work, *Nathaniel Hawthorne in His Times*, using the exact same phrasing, judge “Little Annie’s Ramble” to be an “innocuous descriptive sketch[]” (Miller 105; Mellow 77). It might not be quite as innocent as that, however, and Elizabeth Freeman indeed begins her essay, “Honeymoon with a Stranger: Pedophilic Picaresques from Poe to Nabokov,” by stating that, “For readers of Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita*, Nathaniel Hawthorne’s ‘Little Annie’s Ramble’ brings a creepy thrill of recognition” (863). Sánchez-Eppler points out that Hawthorne’s story, as well as any other published in *Youth’s Keepsake*, was intended as much for the parent as the child, “suggesting the pleasure that grown men should or could take in little girls” (151). The story is certainly indicative of Hawthorne’s wish to have verbal “intercourse with some beautiful children—beautiful little girls; he did not care for boys,” as Sophia Peabody, Hawthorne’s then to-be wife, puts it in a journal-letter (qtd. in Mellow 142).

Hawthorne had a complex relationship to children (not just girls, but boys as well), and throughout his life he expressed a desire to either inhabit or have “intercourse” within the realm of children—which is not automatically to counter Julian Hawthorne’s claim that his father had no skeletons in the closet (v). Freeman reads “Little Annie” in strictly pedophilic terms, however, and the story, like *Lolita*, creates a number of “tableaux in which a man’s sexual fantasy is expressed in an (un)rest stop on a journey and in the traumatic doubling of

⁹⁵ Mellow quotes a letter from Hawthorne to his mother in which he expresses dismay over having not been born a girl (23).

⁹⁶ In my analysis of *The Dolliver Romance*, I will deal more with Hawthorne’s transgenering.

adult and child bodies” (864). The tableaux of “Little Annie” form a “honeymoon” space (865) that, according to Freeman, is first and foremost supposed “to manage the kaleidoscopic sexual disorientations produced by an emerging consumer culture” (878). Freeman uses the concept of the honeymoon space to explore the confounding reversals between innocence and consumerism that appear in the story. The honeymoon motif comes to figure in the text as a kind of “semiotic vertigo,” Freeman argues, that reveals how “[t]he tale’s spatial ambiguities [...] both stand for and produce a ‘confusion of tongues’ between kinship (the father-daughter relationship) and sexual intimacy (the marital relationship)” (883). The theme of consumption further relates to what Derek Pacheco calls Hawthorne’s “obsessive interest in images of circulation and exchange” that figure in his early literature aimed at children consumers (285).

Freeman shares with James Kincaid the conceptual metaphor of the “tableau” to describe the relationship between objectified child and adult voyeur or transgressor. Kincaid writes that depictions of children “tend to freeze any movement, to create a kind of affective *tableau*, one in which the child always *is* (and always is fixed) but always is beyond reach” (67; my emphasis). Monika M. Elbert has argued in “Hawthorne’s Gentle Audience and the Feminization of History” that “Hawthorne’s is a woman-centered history and drama,” which is evoked by constructing “emotional tableaux that have at their center an empowering female presence” (93). This would seem to substantiate Sophia Peabody’s comment about her fiancé’s preference for girls over boys. The “imposing woman” may seduce the “male onlooker” in different ways (Elbert 93), but can a similar operation be said to occur in Hawthorne’s child-centered tableaux? Is the child, male or female, empowered by innocence?

In Hawthorne's story, the ability of the narrator to "fix" Little Annie is complicated by her uncertain, "floating" ontological status, and her strangeness is infinitely seductive to the narrator. However, Hawthorne's narrator appears both to be fascinated and frustrated by the enigmatic thingness of Annie. Once again, therefore, we shall see the expansiveness of Hawthorne's romantic method, which, rather than "ultimate harmony," produces "a kind of negative dialectic, an unfathomable experience and sense of mystery that lies beyond human understanding and comprehension and remains disturbingly intact" (Coale 2). I want to push farther Freeman's analysis of pedophilia by paying more attention to the relation between childhood and animality in the story, as this complicates the already "confusing" intimacy between child and adult. The narratological positioning of Annie is confused by the narrator's inability to determine her as being distinct from the animals that we encounter in the story. Adding to the trouble, then, is the "brutish" influence of animals, to the degree that animalistic qualities come to intersect with child-being; at the same time, however, the animals appear to inhabit a further mystery, which remains as unfathomable to Hawthorne as that of the child. Childhood and animal ontology, in this text, come to center on the question of mimesis, which is triggered by the keyword, "aping." In this section, I will thus show how the preposterous comes to turn on the correspondences between childhood and animality in Hawthorne's fiction, as this has been left unexplored by the previous scholarship. Moreover, the child-animal complex, as we might refer to it, is further complicated by the motif of consumption.

The narrator of Hawthorne's story can be said to fit Kathryn Bond Stockton's archetype of the "adult queer child" (*The Queer Child* 64)—who exhibits delayed maturity and a fascination, sometimes erotic, with children and childhood objects—and the prose as well as the devices that Hawthorne makes use of seem to have an "infantile" quality to them. The narrator paints himself as what we in Danish would call a *legeonkel*—an adult male who is fond of playing (*lege*) with children, while not necessarily being anyone's actual uncle (*onkel*). (I don't know of any other language where such a specific designation may occur). In general, the term can be used to paint someone as childish, and this certain "someone" is more often than not a bachelor, or has demonstrated a certain incompatibility with the adult world. A link between narrator and author can be established here. As opposed to patriarchy, Hawthorne sees himself as what we might call an "uncle-author." Etymologically, "uncle" means "little grandfather" (Bremmer 73), and, hierarchically, the uncle's position to his sister's or brother's children is inferior or secondary to that of the parents. "Uncle" thus contains a diminutive connotation. To the extent that he is on the same "level" as them, Hawthorne's role as uncle-author is to instruct children in the enjoyment and consumption of small things.

"Little Annie's Ramble" begins with the cheerful onomatopoeia of ringing bells, "Ding-dong! Ding-dong!" (9:121). The chiming of the bells demands the reader's attention, and we are immediately put in a childish mood—that of surprise. Further, the aural injunction, rendered synesthetically on the page, finds a corollary in the narrator's use of imperative verb-phrases to indicate that his ramble with little Annie is set to occur in the immediate future. "Little Annie *shall* take a ramble with me [...]. [W]e *will* set forth!" (121; my emphasis). The feeling of surprise quickly transforms into a planned outing, in other words. The narrator, a "thinly veiled" Hawthorne (Miller 13), is stalking the girl's house,

waiting for an opportunity to steal her away on a stroll through town beyond the purview of the parental gaze.

The story is not only “oddly anti-domestic,” as Sánchez-Eppler remarks (151), but it even “refuses to reproduce the father-daughter dyad or to contain the child in domestic space” (Freeman 880). The narrator is certain of Annie’s mood: “I can see that the pretty child is weary of this wide and pleasant street, with the green trees flinging their shade across the quiet sunshine, and the pavements and the sidewalks all as clean as if the housemaid had just swept them with her broom” (9:121). Her ostensible weariness translates into an “impulse to go strolling away—that longing after the mystery of the great world” which the narrator himself claims to have felt in childhood (121). The narrator’s prose is littered with exclamations—“Oh!,” “See!” (121)—and other affirmations of the child’s exuberance that serve as anxious assurances to the reader who may suspect that the narrator harbors less-than-noble intentions toward Annie. His surprise is performative rather than actually experienced, however. His interest in Annie is one of vicariousness: the child inhabits the “wild world” (125) of fairy tales and foreign animals,⁹⁷ which the narrator can only approximate through, variously, an anthropomorphizing and exoticizing language. And yet, for all their differences, the narrator rhetorically wonders, perhaps “anxiously” (Freeman 879), “Are there any two living creatures, who have so few sympathies that they cannot possibly be friends?” (Hawthorne 9:127). As such, despite the fact that he walks with “a measured step”—the adult as an Oberon-figure has his spirit “nail[ed] [...] to the earth” (Normand 14)—while Annie’s feet might very well “dance away from the earth,” “there is sympathy between [them]” (Hawthorne 9:122). The adult and the child differ in physical stature and volume, but more

⁹⁷ Hawthorne’s grouping of Annie with the animals in the story preempts Freud’s assertion of 1917 that, “A child can see no difference between his own nature and that of animals” (*CP* 4:351). The child inhabits a space prior to the adult’s later “imaginary” separation from animality, which has allowed us “to annihilate the bond of community between [us] and the animal kingdom” (351).

significantly there is an ontological lightness to Annie, which refuses to be grounded among the “leaden feet” of adults (9:123). This corresponds to Hawthorne’s evaluation of childhood as belonging to an elevated level of imagination. The sympathy between child and adult seems to flourish fully while walking.

In her analysis of *Lolita*, Stockton pays especial attention to the question of motion, the motion of the young girl as “remembered by a recollecting Humbert [Nabokov’s narrator] who describes it as he ‘read’ it” (*Queer Child* 138). Stockton then asks: “what motive is implied by her movements? [...]. [D]o her motions that are themselves relational (marked in relation to his positions) indicate any change in their relation?” (138). Seemingly, what moves Little Annie in Hawthorne’s story is her anti-gravitational pull away from the adult world, and it is not clear that her movement should be predicated on any kind of “intention” as such. Walking rather promotes the indeterminacy of childhood that Hawthorne generally celebrates, and the child’s feet appear to move her in a direction away from the fixating teleology of maturation. Annie’s flighty motion un-fixes the ability of the prose to secure her within the frozenness of the child-scape as tableau; and, in this way, Annie’s gait is antithetical to the “downward” force that Heidegger associates with homesickness. The sympathy between Annie and the narrator appears to be based on the fact that, like Hawthorne who felt that, “[b]y some witchcraft,” he had “been carried apart from the main current of life, and [found] it impossible to get back again” (15:251), the narrator is too far “astray” of humanity (9:129). Annie by virtue of her childish ontology is already not quite human, whereas the narrator’s maturation is put on hold, and possibly affected permanently, having been influenced by Annie. In fact, it is almost as if the narrator is moving backwards in time, at the same time as he is progressing through space with Annie. That they both inhabit a sphere outside the purview of humanity adds a “bestial” element to the ostensible

pedophilia of the story, which is further heightened by Annie's connection to the actual animals of the story, as we shall see.

As with children, Hawthorne had an ambiguous relationship to the nonhuman world. Hawthorne's level of generosity towards any animal appears to have depended upon its proximity to his domestic ideal. In *Civilized Creatures*, Jennifer Mason says of the critical tradition of Hawthorne scholarship that the opinion has largely been that "Hawthorne linked people to animals for the purpose of depicting the former's boorishness, dependency, or genetic inferiority" (53).⁹⁸ The parallel he draws between animals and humans is nevertheless sometimes more sympathetic. Consider the following entry in *The American Notebooks*, for example:

If we consider the lives of the lower animals, we shall see in them a close parallelism to those of mortals;—toil, struggle, danger, privation, mingled with glimpses of peace and ease; enmity, affection, a continual hope of bettering themselves, although their objects lie at less distance before them than our own do. Thus, no argument from the imperfect character of our existence, and its delusory promises, and its injustice, can be drawn in reference to our immortality, without, in a degree, being applicable to our brute brethren. (8:300)

⁹⁸ Providing a theoretical context, in *The Open* Giorgio Agamben says that, "the inhuman [is] produced by animalizing the human [...] and the non-man is produced by the humanization of an animal: the man-ape, the *enfant sauvage* or *Homo ferus*, but also and above all the slave, the barbarian, and the foreigner, as figures of an animal in human form" (37).

In a surprising move, the allusion to moral betterment recalls one of the basic tenets of the Constitution, and Hawthorne is clearly moving away from a strict binary between human and beast that had characterized earlier periods, and which Benjamin Franklin also grappled with in *The Autobiography* (see Medoro, “Benjamin Franklin’s *Autobiography* as an Eighteenth-Century Omnivore’s Dilemma” 99). It is clear that at least in the latter part of his life, Hawthorne was beginning to make an explicit ontological connection between the human species and other parts of the animal kingdom. At certain points, he even suggests that human existence is inferior to that of animals, as when he addresses the issue of language in *The American Notebooks*: “language—human language—after all, is but little better than the croak and cackle of fowls, and other utterances of brute nature; sometimes not so adequate” (8:130).

While he would occasionally use the “sensual” behavior of some animals—pigs in particular, as Rita K. Gollin has pointed out in “The Animal Department of Our Nature”—to construct “a metaphor for the human state, a caricature of the lowest common denominator of our animal selves” (145), it is clear that “brute” as a marker of nature is not necessarily a negative term for Hawthorne. Indeed, in his notebook, a decade earlier than the above entry, in 1838, he denigrates a group of “caravan people” visiting the area of Shelburne Falls in Massachusetts for lacking “the wild dignity of men familiar with the *nobility of nature*” (8:141). On this occasion, the men’s “rough” and “ignorant” natures are found to be antithetical to brutish or “noble” nature (141). (Hawthorne betrays a certain level of chauvinism on his part in the same paragraph as he faults the men for being “apparently incapable of taking any particular enjoyment from the life of variety and adventure which they lead” [141]. Perhaps the “exotic” quality of their trade has blinded Hawthorne to the fact

that “caravan” life, like any other mean profession, might be full of “toil, struggle, danger, [and] privation”).

Before moving on, we must further comment on Hawthorne’s assertion that “[animals’] objects lie at less distance before them than our own do,” since this appears to characterize childhood as well; continually, in Hawthorne’s *oeuvre*, children are said to exist at an “indefinable remoteness” (13:465). The perceived proximity to objects appears to determine childhood and animality alike. Hence, in his journal entry, Hawthorne is anticipating the distinction that the German zoologist, Jakob von Uexküll, was to draw between *Umgebung* and *Umwelt*. As Giorgio Agamben explains in *The Open*, the *Umgebung* concerns “the objective space in which we see a living being moving,” while the *Umwelt* is “the environment-world that is constituted by a more or less broad series of elements that [Uexküll] calls ‘carriers of significance’” (40). The *Umgebung* thus relates to the activity of the human researcher observing a given animal or other organism, and, as such, this positionality is unavailable to the animal. The animal, according to Uexküll, is blind to the existence of other animals, to the extent that it only responds to the carriers of significance peculiar to its particular *Umwelt*, or environment-world. Such a carrier, or “mark” (Agamben 40), would correspond to the kind of food, for example, that an animal relies on to sustain itself, and only to the degree that another animal interacts with the same food-object will the animal be able to form a relationship to another being. This “relationship” is solely mediated through the specific carrier, however, and does not depend on any kind of inter-subjectivity. Heidegger was to take up Uexküll’s definitions in his lectures on metaphysics to argue that the animal is “poor” in world, while humans are “world-forming,” which means that humans can apprehend an object as *something* unrelated to their own immediate circumstance, while

animals only interact with anything on the basis of how it might affect their direct existence.⁹⁹

Now, we have seen that Hawthorne does not exclude animals from interacting with their surroundings as “objects,” but he nevertheless situates a boundary between animal and human based on a proximity or distance to objects. Hawthorne is not a philosopher, but this idea of distance suggests that human beings, according to Hawthorne, have the ability to step back from their environment in order to take stock of it objectively; they have access to the *Umgebung*, while animals are ultimately absorbed in their *Umwelt*. How does this distinction affect his view on childhood? Where does he locate the child within this framework?

Hawthorne does not shy away from identifying a point of identification between his own children and the animal world. In a notebook entry, he describes Una, his oldest, “drawing a cow on the blackboard” (8:298). She, in turn, is describing her own process of drawing the cow, and Hawthorne reports her as saying, “‘I’ll kick this leg out a little more’,” by which she displays “a very happy energy of expression, completely identifying herself with the cow; or, perhaps, as the cow’s creator, conscious of full power over its movements” (298). We can here draw a parallel between the child’s power of expression and that of the adult novelist. Hawthorne is Una’s “creator,” in terms of both paternity and authorship. Further, the “perhaps” of the sentence highlights Hawthorne’s ambiguity in this regard. He has sired Una, but his “perhaps” shows that he “sketches” her with less certainty. Her “allegorical name,” in Gillian Brown’s phrasing, thus renders ambiguous her “ancestral inheritance” as well as her textual self. In this way, Hawthorne circumvents his own position as patriarch in

⁹⁹ Any distinction between *Umgebung/Umwelt* or poverty/richness in world comes down to a prior division within the human, according to Agamben, between “organic” (which he also refers to as “bare life”) and “animal,” or “relational,” life: “It is possible to oppose man to other living things, and at the same time to organize the complex—and not always edifying—economy of relations between men and animals, only because something like an animal life has been separated within man, only because his distance and proximity to the animal have been measured and recognized first of all in the closest and most intimate place” (15-16).

an effort, perhaps, to encourage his daughter to seek out connections not bounded by her immediate familial circumstances, similar to how he had sought to distance himself from his Uncle Robert's pseudo-paternal authority. If not confusing or inverting the Hawthornian genealogy, we may see this as an attempt to disrupt the usual connections between family members, children and adults, coming to bear in turn on what Patricia Parker has called the "orthography" of genealogy, property, and line ("Preposterous Events" 193). At the same time, the "perhaps" shows the extent to which Hawthorne seems incapable or unwilling to situate the child on either side of the line dividing human and animal. In this way, Una, drawing the cow, traces a line that is potentially not in line with the discursive separation of human from animal.

More often than not, however, Hawthorne employs the aforementioned strategy of comparing humans to animals in reverse, anthropomorphizing animals in order to show their negative qualities. For example, in his notebook, he freely reiterates the commonplace and sexist comparison between hens and women: "the queer gestures and sounds of a hen, looking about for a place to deposit her egg [...] croaking all the while [...] something laughably womanish in it too" (8:130). As a further point of interest, Hawthorne would sometimes create comparisons even between different animals. During "an exhibition of animals in the vicinity of the village [Shelburne Falls]" in September 1838, he has occasion to make a few notes regarding the countenance of a hyena. This creature "was the most ugly and dangerous looking beast, full of spite, and on ill terms with all nature—looking a good deal like a hog with the devil in him" (8:140, 141). The comparison to a member of the porcine species is not accidental. In *The American Notebooks* there are seven entries for "pigs." While Hawthorne, sometimes speaks ill of pigs, he can also be kindly disposed

towards the “swinish race.” Indeed, the “infinite variety of expression” of pigs fascinates him:

Their language seems to be the most copious of that of any quadruped; and, indeed, there is something deeply and indefinitely interesting in the swinish race. They appear the more a mystery, the longer you gaze at them; it seems as if there was an important meaning to them, if you could but find out. (8:205)¹⁰⁰

The hogs thus do not reflect the “impossible resignation” or “mute stupor” that comes from having been “deprived of language” (Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am* 19). Rather they appear indifferent to human worldliness; they are content in their own *Umwelt*.¹⁰¹

In *The House of the Seven Gables*, the chickens in the yard of the old Pyncheon house seem similarly “unintelligible;” they appear as “a feathered riddle” (2:152), which, with “a sagacious wink”—denoting complicity or mockery?—leaves in doubt Hawthorne’s easy domestication of the hen in his notebook. The farther it appears from the human form, the more Hawthorne can delight in the animal’s otherness, which might even be expressed in domestic terms (151). But when it comes to monkeys, he becomes anxiously hostile. The Italian dancing monkey in *Seven Gables* is consequently despised as an image of Mammon. Focusing on the monkey’s “thick tail curling out into preposterous prolixity from beneath his tartans” (163-64), this scene is dominated by a peculiar mood of genital anxiety. Consulting Noah Webster’s 1841 *American Dictionary of the English Language*, we see that

¹⁰⁰ The hypothetical nature of his commentary shows us that we are not here dealing with something like a Deleuzian “becoming-animal;” Thoreau is for example much more likely to fit this parameter, although the Wild for him must also be mediated.

¹⁰¹ In *The American Notebooks*, Hawthorne makes a firm distinction between human and animal dwelling, and the fate of a nonhuman being depends on the circumstance in which it appears. Considering a fly, he remarks that it is “the most impertinent and indelicate thing in creation,” and “[i]n a room, now—in a human habitation—I could find in my conscience to put him to death; but here [in the wild] we have intruded upon his own domain, which he holds in common with all other children of earth and air—and we have no right to slay him on his own ground” (8:246). This valuation of course prompts further questions: when is it okay to kill animals? Must they first be brought into an artificially constructed “human habitation,” such as an abattoir? Hawthorne’s musings are not specific enough to answer this.

“preposterous” is defined in ways that would be as familiar to Hawthorne as they are to us: for example, in addition to “having that first which ought to be last,” preposterousness denotes general perversity and absurdity, especially in relation to gender (imagining as preposterous “a republican government in the hands of females”) and nature, “treat[ing] last of the antediluvian earth, which was first in the order of nature,” a definition which clearly affirms the anthropocentric world view (181).¹⁰²

The monkey’s face is no less “preposterous,” and its “wrinkled and abominable” form might just as well be called upon, we imagine, to describe the behind of the “covetous little devil” (Hawthorne 2:164). On this account, we are not surprised to find that the “ugly satyrs” in “The Pomegranate Seeds,” Hawthorne’s retelling of the Proserpina myth, who “make merriment out of the lone woman’s [Ceres] distress,” have “faces like monkeys” (7:310). In *Seven Gables*, the monkey’s “enormous tail” steals the show, however, and being “too enormous to be decently concealed under his gabardine” it—“and the deviltry of nature which it betokened”—intrudes upon our attention (2:164). Thus, while a preposterous, disordered state might carry a feminine connotation, according to one of the definitions in Webster’s dictionary, the phallic signification is hard to miss here. The monkey’s snake-like tentacle is certainly too monstrous to be considered a tail proper, and the allusion to Mammon clearly alludes to the hellish and greedy nature of the monkey. But it is really, we might speculate, the fact that “his wilted countenance” is “strangely man-like” that disturbs the narrator. Nobody else in this novel, not even the children, appears to be finding the spectacle particularly devilish. Further, if this individual monkey is “filthy lucre” and “the grossest form of the love of money” incarnate, what might separate “his excessive desire” for coin from the “love” of “sunny” “silks,” “burnished silver,” and “chased gold” that the

¹⁰² Accessed through <http://edl.byu.edu/webster/term/1784093>).

narrator and Annie fawn over in Hawthorne's earlier story (9:123)? In this way, we find a strange issue of man longing to escape consumerism and seeing his own consumption reflected in the monkey.

Elizabeth Freeman alerts the reader to a scene in *Lolita*, in which the amputated limbs of a storefront mannequin suggest the "traumatic doubling of adult and child bodies" (864). In Hawthorne's story, the narrator indeed conflates himself and Annie into the plural "we," and looking at a shop window, he, because it is of course always "he" who determines the use of pronoun, is brought to exclaim "their" love for the previously mentioned commodities as well as other goods on display in the village shops. He sums up their window-shopping by averring, "All that is bright and gay attracts us both" (9:123). Annie, to Freeman, is "first and foremost a consumer" (878). As a matter of dissimilitude, the Mammon-like monkey is slimy and indecent, while Annie as pseudo-consumer is chaste and pure. (Hawthorne's narrator hurries Annie along before she can be "tempted" to actually purchase anything, as if the act itself would exert a "brutish" influence over her).¹⁰³

Namely the "fascination-revulsion reaction" of Goethe (see footnote) is particular to Hawthorne's view of monkeys as well, and the narrator of "Little Annie" not surprisingly

¹⁰³ The linking of monkeys to debauchery was not uncommon in the nineteenth century. In Goethe's *Faust*, for example, monkeys appear as the companions of witches, who are figures of revelry and general non-sense. According to Harvey Dunkle: "Goethe had particular reasons for including monkeys, which are not generally associated with witches and do not belong to Germanic culture. He is dealing here with a natural phenomenon, the human psychological response to the appearance and behavior of monkeys, a feeling that involves a *fascination-revulsion reaction*" (125; my emphasis). Dunkle goes on to trace the *Häßlichkeit* [ugliness] of monkeys from Goethe to the German writer, C. M. Wieland, and after, to Nietzsche, who comments on *die schmerzliche Scham* [the distressing shame] that monkeys provoke in the human onlooker (126). Furthermore, McFarlane, with reference to English eighteenth-century satires against the French, shows how the ape became a foremost signifier of the "distortion of nature" that took place in the sodomite, as he quotes the following lines from a verse known as *The Baboon A-la Mode. A Satyr Against the French*: "Their Modes so strangely alter Humane Shape, / What Nature made a man, they make an Ape" (57). In *Faust*, Goethe explicitly links monkeys and children, as they are both subject to the same feeling of wonderment in the presence of cheap imitations (Part 1, ll. 542-43). In other words, neither monkey nor child seems able to distinguish between base and refined tastes; however, only monkeys are considered ugly or vile. It is not clear the degree to which Goethe may have influenced Hawthorne. Generally, Edwin Haviland Miller has suggested that Hawthorne "was perhaps more for the school of Goethe than of Cotton Mather" (106), and, specifically, that the devil figure in "Young Goodman Brown" "turns out to be a wily, witty diplomat out of Goethe rather than Puritan lore" (111).

describes how the circus monkeys' "ugliness shocks her pure, instinctive delicacy of taste" (9:127). But, further, as we shall see, despite Hawthorne's effort to mark a sharp demarcation between the two, monkeys and children come to resemble each other in that both, albeit in different ways, mimic the adult subject. This operation would also include the disavowal of what he might consider "shameful" or "ugly" about himself. The blurring of ontological boundaries at the same time leads to a blurring of desire lines: given the instability of the child/animal binary can we say that there is a fundamental difference between pedophilia and bestiality? Might one simply be a displaced version of the other, subject to the logic of what psychoanalysis calls "reaction-formation," or perhaps even a perverse form of sublimation? Psychoanalysis remains an anthropocentric discipline, and yet the infantile character of the unconscious, or perhaps we should say the unconscious nature of the child, does not recognize the boundaries of binary structures, of which human/animal is merely one. For this reason, childhood is especially amenable to the structuring confusions of inversion. In this way, we can see Hawthorne's tale about little Annie as a representation of this "unconscious" unruliness; it may indeed be that Annie has more in common with "the untameable" quality of the tiger than the faithful dog or the courteous elephant (126).

The animals in Hawthorne's story seemingly revere Little Annie, and they treat her like the queen of the animal kingdom. Annie enjoys an intimate connection to the animals she and the narrator encounter on their walk.¹⁰⁴ The narrator's desire for Annie is complicated by the presence of this "bestial" intimacy. The inability to separate child from animal in any kind of fundamental way allows us to see bestiality as a subset of pedophilia within the logic of the story. In medieval times, bestiality was equated with sodomy, and "[i]nstead of being an inanimate, irrelevant object," Joyce E. Salisbury notes, "the animal

¹⁰⁴ In *The Beast Within*, Joyce E. Salisbury notes that, according to ancient Aelian myth, animals would often fall in love with male and female children alike. (86).

partner became just that, a partner in an ‘unnatural’ act, just as homosexuality was an act between two partners” (91). Curiously, around the eighth century in Spain, “the penalty for intercourse with ‘small animals’” was increased with no apparent explanation (92). Salisbury asks: “Were small animals considered more ‘bestial’ than large animals? Was the size differential considered more ‘unnatural’? Was this a practical consideration recognizing the damage likely to be done to a small animal?” (92). The question of scale is namely central to the child/animal pairing in Hawthorne’s story, and as Laurence Rickels puts it in the short piece “Tot’s Tomb,” “Smallness makes itself more available to the [child’s] range of vision. But it also intensifies the relationship” (no page number).

What if we were to read Hawthorne’s animals as “anatomical complements” to Little Annie, then—that is to say, as representatives of “an impossible excess haunting reality” (Barnard 173) overwhelming the desire of the text? My claim is the following: the animal figures as this excess, and it should be considered as the “anatomical complement” to the child; the animal is the surplus of child-like “wildness,” as that which cannot be contained within the “child” as a container for the adult’s desire. “Animal” itself is only a symbolic placeholder, since what it is brought forth to represent is in fact unrepresentable. But the unrepresentability of the animal merely recalls the strangeness of the child, which is part of the allure for the pedophile. To the extent that both animal and child inhabit what we have called an “excessive presentness,” the desiring gaze of the adult might then, perhaps unconsciously, include them in the same process of objectification.

In “American Bestiality: Sex, Animals, and the Construction of Subjectivity,” Colleen Glennery Boggs argues that bestiality “marks a moment [...] where symbolic representation is both suspended and emergent, where the metaphoric and the metamorphic conjoin and become differentiated, where the categories of the human subject and the animal

abject come into play” (100). This “conjoining” takes place intertextually in Hawthorne’s authorship; the textual copulation of child and animal creates a hybrid or chimera that can only be discerned by virtue of the tropes that support this union.¹⁰⁵ Thus, obscuring the sexuality of children does not prevent it from surfacing elsewhere, albeit in different but no less troubling forms. The close relation of monkey and child at once allows Hawthorne to venerate the child for being unlike the monkeys, but this is also what permits the fluidity between the two species (the child is almost a sub-species of the adult) to take shape. The desire for shiny objects that Annie shares with the Mammon-monkey in *Seven Gables* renders her proximate to his “prolix” limb as well. The simian tentacle thus reaches beyond *Seven Gables*—more than a decade into the past, to be precise. This intertextual “doubling” is perhaps even more traumatic than what the amputated limbs of the mannequin in *Lolita* suggest to Freeman; the “[intra-]literary trajectory” within Hawthorne’s *oeuvre* is indeed “perverse” (Freeman 864). The transition from Annie’s childish desire to the monkey’s bestial obsession with “filthy lucre” is evolutionarily preposterous. Western cultural history supplies us with a precedent in this regard, concerning the fearful “belief in the possibility of reproduction across species boundaries” (Fudge, “Monstrous Acts” 22), which is textually reproduced in Hawthorne’s text, “polluting” childhood through a measure of association. In this way, we should add “species” to the “intensively policed structures—gender, class, ethnicity”—that Cameron McFarlane argues have historically been conflated under the aegis

¹⁰⁵ As an historical point of reference, we can trace the preposterous trope to the punitive reach of early modern bestiality laws. As John M. Murrin states “in any sexual relation with an animal [...] a man was seen doing the devil’s work in a way that went beyond conventional sins. God had created an orderly nature with clear boundaries between humans and beasts. Satan, and the buggerers who served him, were challenging those boundaries and threatening to deduce everything to confusion” (117). However, as we have seen previously, the threat of confusion is produced by the discourse that impugns it: “By criminalizing a crossing of the species barrier, the law tries to establish and naturalize ontological categories that it simultaneously reveals to be highly unstable” (Boggs 102). Discourse proliferates that which it condemns, and Hawthorne’s texts that blend animality and childhood can be seen to perform something akin to this.

of the discourse on sodomy, thereby “enabling the condensation of a number of transgressions into one sign” (60). Put succinctly, while we would like to imagine that the face of Hawthorne’s monkey corresponds to the backside of the child, this is not quite the case.

VI. Aping

Franz Kafka’s short story, “A Report to an Academy” (1917), is probably the most famous fictional account of “aping;” it is a scene of an “ape aping humanity’s aping,” as Michael Taussig puts it in *Mimesis and Alterity* (xviii). While apes can be said to mimic human behavior (a problematic claim in itself), “the way we [humans] picture and talk is bound to a dense set of representational gimmicks which [...] have but an arbitrary relation to the slippery referent easing its way out of graspable sight” (xvii). The overarching fantasy of human expression namely centers on “the public secret” of daily “forgetting” the workings of the “mimetic faculty,” which “carries out its honest labor suturing nature to artifice and bringing sensuousness to sense by means of what was once called sympathetic magic” (xviii). “Suturing” presupposes a “wounding,” the primordial “cut”—both understood as the severing of the umbilical cord and the psychical separation from the mother that follows later—that separates us from reality and the “real” thing. The wondrous thing about imitation is that it glosses over the constituent emptiness located at the center of Being. The wonderment of mimesis might nevertheless introduce a host of new blind spots into existence. Thus, Nicole Shukin points to a gap in Taussig’s text as she takes him to task for not acknowledging that “the power of the mimetic faculty and the fetishistic grip of naturalized capitalism cannot, arguably, be separated” (50). She further states that “in his

desire to give nature, in the form of the mimetic faculty, a more active role in culture than constructionism tends to allow, Taussig arguably swings too far the other way and idealizes mimesis as a force—even a marvel—of nature” (50). Aping is seductive, in other words—too seductive according to Shukin’s materialist critique of animal rendering.

Aping is a “biological trope[] [...] mobilized by the racialized discourses of European imperialism and colonialism” (Shukin 21). Hawthorne uses “aping” twice in his story (9:125, 127) to describe the relationship of children and animals, respectively, to the adult human world, thereby inadvertently suggesting that they are both liminal to the human race proper. But while Annie’s aping is charming to the narrator—related as it is to the “visionary,” “peculiar,” and “shadowy” world of dolls (125)—the monkeys imitate humanity in an ugly way that is upsetting to Annie, or so the narrator will have us believe (“Annie does not love the monkeys” [127]). According to the narrator, there are two forms of mimesis at play here, both of which can be subsumed by the signifier “aping.” Interestingly, what might otherwise be considered as a tautology of monkey-behavior, aping is seen as dangerous the closer it comes to the animal to which it refers. In one particular instance, the image of an orangutan brought into focus the anxious position of print money in nineteenth-century America. Stephen Mihm reports that the notorious American counterfeiter, Steven Burroughs, in an effort to mock “two money brokers who published a guide to the various counterfeit notes emanating from Burroughs’s workshop,” sent them a bank note, of his own manufacture, “bearing ‘a figure of an Ourang Outang from whose mouth issue[ed] a label with these words *‘Death or Botany Bay, ha, ha, ha!’*” (“The Alchemy of the Self” 152-53).¹⁰⁶ In this way,

¹⁰⁶ Many outrageous, not to mention humorous, anecdotes attach to Burroughs’ name, and in one instance he is said to have eluded his captors by feigning the direction he was travelling in, having put on his snowshoes ““forward end behind”” (153); but, as Mihm suggests, Burroughs may have invented this story to add to the growing mythical aura surrounding his exploits by fabricating a variation on the myth of Cacus, who specifically threw off his pursuers by dragging ““his stolen cattle into his cave backwards”” (153). Thus, counterfeiting came to present a direct (preposterous) challenge to authority in late eighteenth and early

Burroughs' orangutan represents an earlier, rebellious counterpart to Frederick Winslow Taylor's image of "the trained gorilla," which is seen as "a mimetic automaton capable of copying the same simple physical task over and over again" (Shukin 89); rather, the orangutan in Burroughs' rendering disrupts the reproduction of genuine money.

It is significant that namely an orangutan should become the emblem of a known counterfeiter. The ability to imitate so closely the "real" thing (either a bank note or human behavior) is what makes the aping of either so pernicious. (Of course, Lacan would later come to deny animals' ability to "feign" in the first place).¹⁰⁷ The monkey as archetype occupies an insidious place in Hawthorne's imagination: "*it bears a wild and dark resemblance to humanity*" (9:127; my emphasis). Is the counterfeiting orangutan fundamentally different from the child imitating adult behavior? Hawthorne's inability to maintain or domesticate the boundary between animal and child—since it is entirely too fluid—creates a series of central confusions in his prose. The child's world is undoubtedly "wild" (125), but not in the same "queer" way as that of the monkey, Hawthorne suggests. It seems that the narrator of "Little Annie" is operating with two levels of mimesis, and this division serves to ground Annie in a fanciful if "peculiar" realm of dolls and fairytales (125). The monkeys, on the other hand, are too unruly to be domesticated in this way. To use Shukin's terminology, the narrator has a specific motive for "rendering" the monkeys in a

nineteenth-century America by suggesting that money in itself could not have anything but a ludicrous relation to any kind of original value.

¹⁰⁷ Referencing different texts by Lacan, Derrida engages the idea that animals are "characterized by an incapacity to *pretend to pretend* [...] or to *erase its traces*" (*The Animal That Therefore I Am* 120). In *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan says that, "it is obvious that the things of the human world are things in a universe structured by words, that language, symbolic processes, dominate and govern all" (45). The animal, according to Lacan, never passes from the imaginary to the symbolic order, and, hence, the animal is separated out from the human on the basis of lacking access to language. However, as Derrida shrewdly points out, "if 'the human order is distinguished from nature,' it is, paradoxically, because of an imperfection, because of an originary lack or defect [*défaut*] in man, who has, in sum, received speech and technics only inasmuch as he lacks something" (122). For Lacan, while he continues the anthropocentric tradition of psychoanalysis, marking a difference between animals and human beings is not a question of, for example, justifying maltreatment of animals on the basis that they lack human qualities; neither is it clear that being "prey to language" (121) is better than being preyed upon by other beasts in the wild.

way that is different from Annie. His own language works against his efforts, however, and his descriptions of the animals as “chattering, ill-natured, mischievous and queer little brutes” (127) lead to a point of disruption in his own imitative work.

The main “representational crisis” (Freeman 879) of the story falls on the word “queer.” As with the “queer gestures and sounds” of the hens, Hawthorne’s use of “queer” in this instance tells us that the behavior of the monkeys works to subvert his descriptive language. As a catch-all for non-verbal signification, “queer” names Hawthorne’s failure at representing that which is too odd for symbolic assimilation.¹⁰⁸ Noting that, “Imitation is a particular case of repetition that usually involves a person repeating (if not abstractly) the actions or attitudes presented by someone else,” Bryan R. Warnick provides a list of meanings that may attach to imitation as a mimetic act: respect, worship, plagiarism, mockery, and conformity (84). In either case, imitation appears to consist of a backward glance, the repetition of prior significations—reversing the authority of teleology that mirrors the linearity of “proper” syntax on the textual level, which negatively calls attention to the threat of reading, or indeed living, “preposterously” (cf. Parker, “Preposterous Events” 189); however, the disorder that the preposterous calls forth might be generated by the very order that seeks to suppress it: “the disorder or crisis which is characterized as sodomitical often actually emerges from within ‘order’ itself, from within those forces defined as the means for excluding disorder and keeping it at bay” (McFarlane 80).

¹⁰⁸ We find this tendency in other writers of this period as well. For example, in *Moby-Dick*, the exotic stranger often eludes Melville’s descriptive language, as in the following passage from chapter 6, “The Street:” “In thoroughfares nigh the docks, any considerable seaport will frequently offer to view the queerest looking nondescripts from foreign parts” (6:31).

For classical rhetoric in the tradition of Ovid and Vergil,¹⁰⁹ however, regression is seen as necessary to the art of composition. As Shane Butler reminds us, “literary imitation is only the tip of the iceberg [pointing to an entire architecture *below*] of a vast array of literal regressions and recursions that writers are taught to pursue [in the ancient context]” (21); this is why the author cannot be said to “move in a straight line but, rather, is always doubling back” (21). Yet, rhetorical or discursive imitation maintains a sense of respect for the original, whereas Hawthorne’s monkeys can only mock their human referent; their “natural” aping is related to the “chaos” that lies “beyond representation” (McFarlane 26). It is not so much that a “beastly” copy is substituted for the original in a preposterous reversal; the real problem is that binary logic does not cohere with the “language” of animals. No wonder, then, that the queer mimicry of monkeys appears at one and the same time too close and too foreign to the human referent. Concomitantly, there is something uncanny about Hawthorne’s confusing use of aping as a signifier to describe something essential about animal- and child-being alike. This relationship is highlighted by the moments of sympathy

¹⁰⁹ Shane Butler presents us with a brilliant, succinct discussion of Orpheus’ so-called “*third* look back in Latin literature” to explicate this classical regressiveness (22); the first is in Virgil, the second and third are found in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Having died, Orpheus here joins his wife, Eurydice, in the underworld: “There’s Eurydice, on the left, and there’s Orpheus, out front, on the right, leading her along, and this time, safely looking back” (22). Butler’s analysis hinges on “a play on the meaning of ‘follow’” (22). In the last line of Ovid’s text, Eurydice appears to follow “Orpheus because she is behind him in the left-to-right movement of the line of writing, although, in a more ordinary sense, it is Orpheus who ‘follows’ Eurydice, since *Orpheus* [in Ovid’s Latin syntax] comes after *Eurydicen*” (22). This is a clear-cut example of hysteron proteron, complete with a syntactical inversion that additionally preempts Patricia Parker’s reading of the preposterous trope in Shakespeare’s *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, in which a central scene, Costard’s perceived crime in Act 1, Scene 1, produces “a reversal of the order of male and female in Genesis 2, where Eve, created *after* Adam, is meant to follow *him* as a subordinate or sequel rather than the other way around” (Parker, “Preposterous Events” 187). The chronological, syntactical, and mythical reversals implicit in Ovid’s text, and Butler’s subsequent reading of it, are vertiginous. As if this were not enough, Butler, on the preceding page, had quoted a remarkable passage from the Roman historian Suetonius, reporting on Vergil’s revisions of the *Georgics* poem: “his [Vergil] daily practice was to dictate a large number of verses he had devised in the morning and then, by going back over them (*retractando*) all day long, to edit them down to just a few, saying, not entirely without reason, that he was giving birth to his poem *as a bear does*, licking it into shape only afterward” (21; my emphasis). The materiality of the poetic process, however, signaled by the ursine simile, suggests to Butler that “there is no point in the tenses of this sentence in which the text is as yet unborn; its creation has been entirely eclipsed by its *being worked on*” (21). Within the span of two pages, Butler has thus managed to implicate a preposterous reversal as well as an animal trope as being central to the ancient understanding of rhetoric. In this deconstruction of sorts—which is really just a remembering of archaic lessons—it becomes clear that all writing is aping, insofar as it constitutes imitation.

that occur between Annie and the different animals in the story—at one point a dog “touch[es] little Annie’s hand” knowingly (9:126)—and we might speculate that it is the instances of child-animal sympathy that come to serve as “emblems for the crisis of intergenerational affect” rather than the co-habitation of different animals, a hyena and a bear, for example, as Freeman avers (879). The friendly, or “easy,” relationship between Annie and the animals is at the same time what disturbs the sympathetic bond between her and the narrator. This crisis is further exasperated by the fact that the backward glance of proper, human mimesis fails to account for the ontological origin of children and animals alike.

VII. Consuming Children

Elizabeth Freeman has suggested that, representing the pedagogical event in reverse, “it is the narrator who observes and mimics Annie’s reactions, rather than vice and versa” (878). At the same time, however, as Freeman notes, “the distinctions [...] between child and adult, pedagogy and pleasure” are confounded as the two unlikely “travelers move through spaces that alternate between domestic and urban, *heimlich* and *un-heimlich*” (879). We have already established that Hawthorne had a tendency to disdain education in his work—he (mostly) homeschooled his own children (see Mellow 537)—and Annie, Freeman affirms, “is rescued from the confines of home and metaphysical classroom” by accepting the narrator’s invitation of walking together (881). Laurence Rickels has called attention to the fact that,

The child did not really begin to exist - and to exist with equal rights to commemoration - until literacy was established as unconditional requirement for

socialization. Inside the new holding patterns of schooling, a longer attention span had to be inscribed letter by letter upon each new candidate for society membership. This little one who was now in training, in transition, came to be known as the child. (“Tot’s Tomb”)

Accordingly, we should see Little Annie’s outing, led by the narrator, as a turn away from the pedagogical impetus of enforced order and linearity through a program of rectitude that since the early modern period had been linked “to the production of social order and precedence” (Parker, “Preposterous Events” 189). This resonates in the American context as well. Noah Webster’s essay “On the Education of Youth in America” (1790) propounds, on the very first page, that “[t]he impressions received in early life usually form the characters of individuals, a union of which forms the general character of a nation” (43). America, according to Webster, should aim to improve upon the educational modes of Europe in ways that will be suitable to “our local and political circumstances” (45), while preserving the “inseparable” tie between education and morality (44). Indeed, in “A Discourse on Education, Delivered at the Dedication and Opening of Bristol Academy [New Bedford], the 18th Day of July, A.D. 1796,” Unitarian minister Simeon Doggett avows that the two principle objects of education are “literature and morality” (150). The objective of the latter, and more important, field is “to meliorate the heart, to conform the affections, will, and conduct to the rules of rectitude or will of our Maker and great Moral Governor” (150). Once more, we see how the ubiquity of the vertical metaphor (“rectitude”) comes to subtend the tenets of proper human development.

In this dissertation, the term “counter-sodometry” has been used to indicate the disruption of the “negative” sodometries that have had the effect of classifying something or someone as sodomitical through “relational structures precariously available to prevailing

discourses” (Goldberg, *Sodomities* 20). I am not in this regard suggesting that homeschooling was ever thought of as being akin to sodomy, but I think it is fair to say that any practice that disrupts the linearity of the sanctioned instruction of children becomes vulnerable of condemnation; indeed, as Jonathan Goldberg points out several times in his book, the word sodometry relates not only to deviant sexual practices but to “falseness” in general, which translates to “a denial of [...] that social ordering that is thought to participate in and to replicate the order of being” (*Sodomities* 122). In a letter to Hawthorne, Ellery Channing, his one time neighbor, namely expresses concern over the practice of homeschooling, since, as he writes, “Nothing seems to me more unfortunate in this land of activity, than to bring up children in seclusion, without the invaluable discipline that a good school presents” (qtd. in Mellow 537). Once again, we see how the binary activity/passivity is invoked in relation to the body politic.

Recalling Kathryn Bond Stockton’s terminology that we drew upon above, walking, in the instance of Hawthorne’s text, “delays” the education of little Annie; but, as we asserted then, delaying still “moves” us towards something. As we will recall, most apparent to Stockton is the fact that delay “has relations with relations it stalls. (Labor relations, for example)” (*Queer Child* 62-63). Children might therefore at times both physically and figuratively be transported into spaces that are not *heimlich* to their state of delayed growth. The introduction to consumer culture is an example of this.

The advent of consumerism expanded and exaggerated conventional ways of objectifying otherness; the economic structure that led to the production of consumer culture can in fact be said to have created many of the categories of inclusion/exclusion that we now take for granted. For example, Sherryl Vint has shown that the human/animal boundary dates from the early modern period, and that it correlates with “the shift toward capitalist economy

that increasingly regards the world as resource, and toward a rationalised conception of the universe that turns everything into object for the human subject” (26). Voicelessness in turn leads to objectification. Children and animals are both vulnerable in this way. Shukin suggests that,

Even more than the most unintelligible figures of human life and precarity—subaltern women—animals suffer the double binds of representation: they are either excluded from the symbolic order on the grounds of species difference, or anthropomorphically rendered within it. (129)

Similarly, as Stephanie Paulsell puts it, “children are even more vulnerable than women to being unheard, silenced, spoken for by others, or to believing they must speak in a voice approved by others in order to be heard” (87). We are thus left with the somewhat paradoxical situation that, as James Kincaid points out, “We live under the assumption that children are especially privileged and that our entire culture is ‘child-centered,’ but the ‘romantic mythology’ encrusting childhood is very much like that used for racial and gender power-moves” (64). It is no wonder, then, that a doll—“an actor and a sufferer in a thousand shadowy scenes”—is Little Annie’s “true plaything” (Hawthorne 9:125), just as she is the narrator’s.

The enjoyment that Hawthorne’s narrator takes in Annie is distinctly related to the consumption of childhood commodities, and based on our findings it is difficult not to sense a cannibalistic undertone to the narrator’s description of “the dainties of a confectioner; those pies, with such white and flaky paste, their contents being a mystery, whether rich mince, with whole plums intermixed, or piquant apple, delicately rose-flavored; [...] those sweet little circlets, sweetly named kisses” (9:123). “Oh! my mouth waters, little Annie” (124), but which “rose-flavored” object is he really dying to sink his teeth into? As if he had detected

the reader's incredulity, the narrator adds, "and so doth yours [her mouth]" (124), in order to deflect his desire onto the level of the apparent innocence of childish desire. The oral drive is exemplary in psychoanalysis, and orality, Laplanche says, "implies both a certain mode of relation, say incorporation, and a certain type of object, one which is capable of being swallowed or incorporated" (*Life and Death* 11). For psychoanalysis, "incorporation" is less about ingestion of nutrients and more about the fantasy of "cannibalism," which contains such meanings as: "preserving within oneself, destroying, assimilating" (20). Freud, in *Group Psychology*, reminds us that tenderness and aggression are intimately linked in the oral phase of development, "in which the object that we long for and prize is assimilated by eating and is in that way annihilated as such" (*SE* 18:105). It is not unlikely that the affect of the mourner may resemble that of the cannibal, who, "as we know," says Freud, "has remained at this standpoint; he has a devouring affection for his enemies and only devours people of whom he is fond" (105). The image of an "encrusted" child that Kincaid's text invoked for us above, with its connotation to puff pastry, then, serves as an apt metaphor to our discussion on children and consumption. What is more, incorporation "extends ingestion to an entire series of possible relations," and "one can conceive of incorporation occurring [...] at the level of other bodily orifices, of the skin or even, for instance, of the eyes" (Laplanche, *Life and Death* 20). Once again we see how one function, orality, becomes a metaphor for other drives by invoking a metonymic relationship between different orifices. (In his work, Freud continually states that each phase of development, pertaining to a particular orifice, "persists alongside of and behind the later configurations" [*SE* 22:100]). But just as the functioning of Proserpina's mouth was seen to exist apart from the child's agency in "The Pomegranate Seeds," Hawthorne's narrator treats Little Annie's mouth as though it belonged to "Dame Doll" who inhabits the display window of the toyshop. Dolls

and children are cut from the same imaginative cloth in Hawthorne's tableau, and addressing Dame Doll, "the mimic lady," in the second person, the narrator says that, "A toy yourself, you look forth from your window upon many ladies that are also toys, though they walk and speak, and upon a crowd in pursuit of toys, though they wear grave visages" (Hawthorne 9:125). The eye as the organ of incorporation, linked as it is in psychoanalysis to the mouth, anticipates in this instance the recognition of the doll itself with the female gender, as if that which has come *after*—the material objectification of the female gender, as represented by the doll—could anticipate a *future* objectification of the referent, "woman."

"[T]he society of bearded men, and even of gentler woman" (129) cannot satisfy the narrator. The "mystery" of the "mottoes" that are hidden within sweet "little cockles" (123) provokes his appetite for the childish, unfathomable knowledge concealed under Annie's skin. But, doll-like, there is no depth to Annie, and surface and depth are completely conflated as a result; consequently, the thingness of the child cannot be located either internally or externally. It is perhaps this that prompts the narrator to ponder what Annie might think "if, in the book which I mean to send her, on New Year's day, she should find her sweet little self, bound up in silk or morocco with gilt edges, there to remain till she become a woman grown, with children of her own to read about their mother's childhood! That would be very queer" (124). This passage is rich in texture, and manages to sum up the elements of our discussion in different ways: the narrator seems to think that the way to "fix" Annie is to "bind" her within a representation, which, presented in the most gorgeous and "appetizing" manner, will make her want to devour herself, so to speak. This imaginary,

queer sort of hornbook intends to communicate to the futural Annie the narcissistic virtue of self-consumption, which might be the only way the narrator can think to counter the overwhelming sensations of the “crowd” (129); ironically, the production of such a decadent commodity could not possibly be separated from the crowd-culture of modern society. At the same time, however, he cannot help but extend the image of Annie consuming herself to her own children to-be, who, by virtue of the maternal role, will come to know Annie’s “snow-covered” “summits” (123)—potentially an “oriental” reference¹¹⁰—in a much more intimate and sensual way than he could ever hope. As such, the story certainly “serve[s] as an important index for the mutually informing changes in family form and structures of feeling, modes of production, and technologies of identity and belonging” (Freeman 881), but, as I have argued, these “changes” must be understood within the preposterous interplay of imitation and consumption.

In a similar vein, Luther S. Luedtke proposes that the introduction of “Oriental figures,” such were on display at the Salem East India Marine Society, to “Hawthorne’s milieu [...] softened the commercialism of everyday life and suggested realms of idleness, imagination, and sensuality quite contrary to Puritan Massachusetts” (27). This contrariness amounts to a localized disruption of the mercantile system of exchange and a passivity, a “squandering of productive vitality” (McFarlane 54), that is antithetical to American masculinity, as it was being defined in relation to the marketplace. In “Little Annie,” the connection between the girl and the “Oriental” elements of the story is made clear as a “Chinese mandarine [...] nods his head at Annie” (9:124). But since the mandarine’s gesture

¹¹⁰ Hawthorne’s description of the confectionary treats that his narrator and Annie yearn for appears to evoke a common “oriental” allusion to far-off mountain ranges. In March 1836 Hawthorne published a poem by one Lydia H. Sigourney titled “The Mariner of the First-Seen Mountain, on Approaching His Native Coast” in the *American Magazine of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge*. The poem relates how the “Himmaleh aspires / With snowy breast o’er Indian vales” (qtd. in Luedtke 11). Since Hawthorne considered Sigourney to be insufferable (Luedtke 11), we might imagine that his decision to publish this particular poem, not long after the publication of “Annie” in 1835, was influenced by her use of such appealing imagery.

is also aimed at the narrator (125), it is clear that he becomes implicated in the alterity of the spectacle no less. Curiously, then, framed by Eastern “sensuousness,” the ostensibly perverse intimacy between child and adult appears less preposterous than the imposing reality of emerging nineteenth-century consumerism, and their relationship might even, as if creating a positive out of two negatives, engender a sense of order in the midst of the rush to produce and exchange goods and wealth; rambling with children thus provides the weary adult a reprieve from the “crowd” (129). The ambiguous strain of desire that runs from adult to child to animal, sometimes crossing directions, at once speaks to the influences of foreign objects and also the confusions inherent to a changing nation at this time.

VIII. Stalking Youth: “The Village Uncle”

It may be true that there have been some unsubstantial pleasures here in the shade, which I should have missed in the sunshine; but you cannot conceive how utterly devoid of satisfaction all my retrospects are. I have laid up no treasure of pleasant remembrances, against old age.

—Hawthorne, Letter to H.W. Longfellow

In “Little Annie’s Ramble” we saw how the notion of pedagogy in Hawthorne is confused by the enigmatic qualities of the child, the unfathomable nature of which is heightened in the presence of animals—especially in regards to monkeys. The themes of knowledge and instruction are similarly important to consider in “The Village Uncle,” which was first published in the annual gift book *The Token and Atlantic Souvenir*, 1835, under the title of “The Mermaid; A Reverie.” As in the case of “Little Annie” and “The Gentle Boy,” it was later collected in *Twice-Told Tales*. In his article “The Mermaid and the Mirror: Hawthorne’s ‘The Village Uncle,’” Leo B. Levy suggests the moral of the tale is that

schooling “leads to intellectual pride and to alienation from humankind” (205). He soon retracts this conclusion, as he deems it “deceptively simple” (205). Levy’s concern is to show that Hawthorne’s tale rather aims at combining the “life of the imagination and the life rooted in the family,” in order “to form an order of values that only death can discompose” (211). Despite Levy’s hesitancy, the “fatal treasure” of education seems indeed to be antithetical to “the fairest hope of Heaven” (Hawthorne 9:318, 323), and the story appears to be obsessed with revealing “an order of values” that death namely *cannot* “discompose.”

In this regard, it is interesting to note that the advent of American pedagogy, as it can be traced to the Republican era, posits that only the proper teaching of morality can guard against the development of an asymmetrical relation between understanding and conduct, as expressed by “the unhappiness sometimes to see gentlemen of the first learning and abilities the lowest sunk in depravity and vice” (Doggett 151). The absence of morality, the rectitude of the soul, disposes the afflicted to a “bestly” station in life, which is the inverse of the “civilizing process” (see Parker, “Preposterous Events” 189). Hawthorne’s rejection of normative schooling should therefore make us attentive to the ways in which his text might reverse or upset common associations regarding narrative sequence, genealogy, and the *telos* of the family.

Levy has argued that Hawthorne’s tale symbolizes “the synthesis of fancy and actuality” (211)—a complete prophetic image mediated through the “neutral territory” of Hawthorne’s theory of romance. But what does the story reveal? “Be this the moral, then,” says the narrator, “In chaste and warm affections, humble wishes, and honest toil for some useful end, there is health for the mind, and quiet for the heart, the prospect of a happy life, and the fairest hope of Heaven” (Hawthorne 9:323). He pronounces this sentiment in front of the hearth, “the sentimentalized heart of the nineteenth-century home” (Bertolini 707), and,

on the face of it, this appears to be a revelation of the virtues and comforts of domesticity. Hawthorne's narrator in this story appears to uphold the transcendent virtues of a temperate life, which nevertheless conflict with the professed virtue of generalized education in antebellum America. This tension strikes a biographical chord, as Gloria Erlich notes Hawthorne's life-long "desire to hide from judgment" (50)—be it in the guise of his professors at Bowdoin or Uncle Robert. As we will see, from boyhood on, the sea became for Hawthorne a symbol antithetical to society's judgments and authority. An early poem of his clearly encapsulates this sentiment: "The Ocean has its silent caves, / Deep quiet, and alone" ("The Ocean" ll. 1-2; 23:6).

Perhaps not surprisingly, in "The Village Uncle," the reference to "some useful end" consequently appears unclear, and perhaps the kind of "toil" that presumably leads to family bliss is foreign to the narrator, whose younger, "solitary figure" resembled "a hermit in the depths of my own mind"—"a scribbler of wearier trash than what I read" (9:311). Indeed, it is impossible not to doubt the veracity of the narrative, which abounds with images of mirrors that distort the content of his recollections. Moreover, as he, just before disclosing the ostensible moral of the story, compares himself to a "magician" who "would sit down in gloom and terror, after dismissing the shadows that had personated dead or distant people, and stripping his cavern of the unreal splendor which had changed it to a palace" (322-23),¹¹¹ it becomes clear that the apocalyptic promise of the beginning of the story must be left unfulfilled, since everything in the story appears as a simulacrum of the narrator's imagination.

¹¹¹ An autobiographical note enters the narrative here, as we will recall how Hawthorne lamented in the letter to Longfellow that he had "made a captive of myself and put me into a dungeon."

Certain things are revealed, nevertheless. The commandment, “Come!,”¹¹² at the outset of the story serves as an incantation to the narrative process, which struggles to synthesize “fancy and actuality.” In order for this sense of integration to occur, however, Hawthorne must collapse generational boundaries and disrupt natural family ties, as this is expressed primarily by the narrator’s function as Village Uncle, and the tension between the mental regression of the old man and the progression of the narrative. In this way, the future comes to depend on a dissolution of the family as we know it through *hysteron proteron*; in the process, we come to witness the regression of his subject position as narrator of the text, confusing pronouns and the proper order of sequence in relation to the plot. This is the chief way in which this story delivers us a view of the American preposterous, then.

Eric Wilson has identified in Emerson’s work a metamorphosis of “raw materials of experiences into golden words” (*Emerson’s Sublime Science* 73); Hawthorne’s Village Uncle, on the other hand, shuns the written word, as he pours all his creative energy into constructing a domestic tableau instead, which can only remain immaterial, nonetheless. His sublimating efforts are directed at writing as a vain endeavor, as a stand-in for sensuality, and his reverie is largely concerned with disavowing his previous pursuits as a writer and scholar; in this way, the narrator may be seen to invoke Cotton Mather’s historical bias against poetry, which, to the Puritan, is indicative of a “sickly appetite” (see Montgomery

¹¹² This recalls Revelations: “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come” (Rev. 22:17). At the threshold of the text, we are thus introduced to a language of the end, the conclusion of the earthly order of things prior to the second coming of Christ.

251).¹¹³ While Hawthorne's narrator is anxious to disavow his literary past, his mimetic faculty is working overtime to fashion the domestic reverie that filters through the narrative; in other words, he is making ample use of the skills he so disparages, which again recalls for us Hawthorne's ambiguous relation to his own schooling. The Village Uncle's unreliability as a narrator stems from this incongruity.

The emphasis on the domestic sphere somehow chafes against the voyeuristic tendencies that creep into the narrative towards the close of the middle section—the narrative interval parsing out the domestic tableau that begins and ends the story—just before the return to the fantasmatic home-scene. The more or less cheerful tone of the prose at this point contrasts with how Hawthorne complains in the aforementioned letter to Longfellow that only “through a peep-hole” has he “caught a glimpse of the real world” (15:252). That the narrator's scopophilia is directed at children and adolescents appear significant in this context. His relationship to youth remains distant, and contrary to the narrator of “Little Annie,” the Village Uncle settles for the role of “idle spectator” (9:321). Nevertheless, the story reiterates the basic belief of “Little Annie” that “it is good to steal away from the society of bearded men, and even of gentler woman, and spend an hour or two with children” (129). “I delight,” the Village Uncle thus tells us, “to follow in the wake of a pleasure party of young men and girls, strolling along the beach after an early supper” (321). Then follow different descriptions of how the young people are filled variously with wonderment and disgust at the marine life they encounter on the shore (321). During this passage, the Village Uncle performs the effects of his ostensible old age to excess: “I drag my aged limbs, with a little ostentation of activity, because I am so old, up to the rocky brow of the hill” (321). How

¹¹³ Coviello points out in his reading of *The Blithedale Romance* that writing poetry is portrayed in the novel as a “socially dubious occupation” in the novel. Miles Coverdale, the protagonist, is a poet, which means that he “inhabits a demimonde that lies just on the outer edges of social propriety” (*Tomorrow's Parties* 151).

could we not find this “youthful” stalker—who luxuriates in the way in which a wave “steals softly up to kiss their [the village children’s] naked feet” (320)—entirely harmless?

However, I will be arguing that the particular avuncular title of the story, as it responds to a certain “playfulness” (320), is aimed at desublimating—introducing a passion, perhaps sexual, for peering at young bodies at play—the narrator’s overall project of domesticating his imagination. The middle ground of the narrative thus adds further evidence to our claim that Hawthorne’s child-scapes, as we have taken to calling them, rest on a tension between regression and progression, as well as syntactical and rhetorical disruptions, which greatly disturbs the goal of domestication. What is transmuted in the process is neither clear nor straightforward.

IX. The Texture of Fire

The narrative current of “The Village Uncle” gains momentum from the purifying properties of fire, as represented by the hearth. Hawthorne uses fire initially to suggest the union of different ontological states, but this process fails as the confusions of the narrator disrupt his attempt at integrating the Imaginary and the Actual. In this way, the hearth in Hawthorne’s tale rather comes to embody a chaotic instance of confusion, which engenders some of the central transformations of the story, as these are related to different visions of age. In this text, we find a tension between two different conceptions of youth: the narrator’s wasted youth as a writer and the regressive youthfulness of his old age. The narrator’s scorn for his youthful vocation as a writer—we are shown “the book that I flung down, and the sheet that I left half written, some fifty years ago” (9:322)—reveals a general mistrust of the power of words. Indeed, contrary to Emersonian idealism, words themselves might not be

trusted to reveal anything of real merit. Addressing his dead wife, the narrator of “The Village Uncle” reminds her how “I feared to trust [their children] even with the alphabet; it was the key to a fatal treasure” (318). (Is this a hint to the reader that his language might not reveal anything *essential*?). This fearful boon is opposite the “treasure of past happiness,” by which the narrator means his family life (311). His (presumed) domestic past is contrasted, in the same sentence, with that of his hermitage as a writer, and the chronology of his life is obscured as a result.

It is significant that Hawthorne should express this anti-educational impulse in a story in which the narrator, an old man in front of the fire, “confuses memory with the present moment of his dying” (Montgomery 307). This confusion is not lost entirely on the narrator, however, as he exclaims, “Ah! the old man’s ears are failing him; and so is his eye-sight, and perhaps his mind; else you would not all be so shadowy, in the blaze of his Thanksgiving fire” (9:311). Different sensations blur together, and his confused state appears to bear on the very prose of the story. Speaking of himself in the third person, he nonetheless addresses his youthful, if ghostly, audience directly as “you” in one and the same sentence. It is as if his imminent passing away—what Rita K. Gupta calls “the progressive disintegration of his faculties” (“The Technique of Counterstatement” 156), which is concomitantly the regression of his subjectivity—in this passage renders his “I” of the rest of the story inoperative; or, perhaps, it is the presence of the ghostly children that leaves his author-self opaque, if only for a moment, and consigns him to an in-between space, from the vantage-point of which he can only address himself as an other. In fact, the “I” of the narration, throughout, flickers in and out of existence like the shadows of the children gathered around the blaze of the hearth (Hawthorne 9:310), which is seen to produce a de-personalizing effect. This fire may

therefore not be as “domesticating” as the one Susan, his wife, appears to “kindle” in his heart (316).

In his work, Hawthorne generally employed fire as a motif signaling ontological impermanence and the blurring of physical and imaginary boundaries. In *The Blithedale Romance*, the “coal-fire” of the narrator’s hotel room soon produces in him “an artificial temperature,” and he is “growing a little too warm” (3:145). His spatial circumstance is influenced by the temporal instability of, at one moment, feeling like his “coal-fire, and the dingy room in the bustling hotel” are “far off and intangible,” only to then considering the transcendentalist colony, Blithedale, as a “vague” and “shadowy” place of his imagination (146).¹¹⁴ Hawthorne’s narrators often experience a degree of separation from reality. Despite the clear fury of the blaze in “The Village Uncle,” the figures of the wraith-like children appear dim to the narrator, and their unearthliness is moreover emphasized by the fact that they move in tandem with the “quivering” flame (9:310). The fantasized outline of the narrator’s dear dead wife, Susan, follows the same uncanny pattern of movement, and with each quiver of the flame she makes him “tremble” (311).

However, as has been pointed out, the narrator’s ontological position is not any less uncertain than that of his audience. As we will remember from our discussion of texture words in Chapter 1, “quiver” is grouped with other “desire” or “*frisson*” words, such as “quaver” and “waver;” these all “express textures of moving bodies” (see page 77 above). As Amardeep Singh explains, texture words of the *frisson* variant can blur spatial and temporal

¹¹⁴ Hawthorne had begun to cherish the magic of fire as an adolescent in Salem. As Jean Normand points out, “Fire was always a magnet to his imagination. In Salem he went to watch all the fires that broke out and remained, a fascinated spectator, gazing at the flames and the bustling firemen, to the great indignation of some” (21). That his fascination with fire should come to appear morbid to some is perhaps owing to the fact that “he used to send his sister out to investigate the fires and tell him whether they were worth getting out of bed for!” (21).

distinctions;¹¹⁵ it is no wonder then that, in Hawthorne's story, the past should appear "to mingle with the present and absorb the future, till the whole lies before me at a glance" (9:318). In "The Village Uncle," texture is used skillfully to portray a scene of shared affect between (im)material bodies that only suffer the boundaries of the imagination. The fire subverts the strictures of air and matter, and the movement of the quivering bodies has a mesmerizing effect on the narrator; it is the convergence of the thing itself with desiring subject, which at that moment transcends earthly desire. But such a unity can of course never hold—only an *apparent* elevation of material matter to transcendental Thing occurs.

In this way, we are impelled to question the Village Uncle's idealized memory of how his wife's "simple and happy nature mingled itself with mine" (9:316). Susan the "mermaid" appears more and more as a phantom of the narrator's unfulfilled wish to possess a family: "fading into pictures on the air" (322), she eludes the Village Uncle's searching gaze backwards, by which he seeks to unify the present. She only exists in "reality" as a representation produced by his mimetic faculty, colored "of a thousand fantastic hues" (312). She can only appear as a synecdoche of her own (presumed past) fullness, which is really an absence. "Dressing her up" as a mermaid is another attempt at concealment—concealing the fact that Susan is not real. The unreality of the mermaid creature adequately shields the narrator from the corresponding, and more traumatizing, unreality of Susan as his wife. In short, she can only gain specificity by virtue of being like "most other things in my earlier days," rendered "picturesque" by his imagination (312). We will see, therefore, that the tension between the Imaginary and the Actual in "The Village Uncle" serves to split the narrator in two: idealized family man ("I am a patriarch!" [322]) and isolated voyeur.

¹¹⁵ <http://www.lehigh.edu/~amsp/texto.html>

In *Moby-Dick*, Melville warns that looking “too long in the face of fire” might “invert thee, deaden thee” (6:424, 425). As “its redness makes all things look ghastly,” the “artificial fire” of the try-works aboard the *Pequod* (424) is much more pernicious than what Hawthorne presents us with in, for example, *The Blithedale Romance*. Nevertheless, by comparing the “Try-Works” chapter of *Moby-Dick* to “The Village Uncle,” Mark L. Asquino suggests that the narrator’s mind has been inverted (414). We find evidence of this in the image of “the pictured Heaven below,” appearing “in the mirror left by the tide in a hollow of the sand” (Hawthorne 9:318), for example, and the Village Uncle’s narrative can only be considered as a revelation through inversion. The airy sphere is turned downward and appears as an inversion of itself.

“The Village Uncle” is ripe with allusions to the baser realities of nature, especially in the middle section of the story. The narrator is similar to the unnamed wanderer who appears in one of Hawthorne’s brief sketches from his notebook: this “person” is

wandering, in manhood, through and among the various castles-in-the air that he had reared in youth, and describing how they look to him—their dilapidation &c. Possibly some small portion of these structures may have a certain reality, and suffice him to build a humble dwelling to pass his life in. (8:251)

The Village Uncle’s fantasmatic rendering of his decrepit hamlet by the ocean is littered with “hovel[s]” and dwellings of “dark and weather-beaten aspect” (9:313). The narrator laments that his “manhood has long been waning with a staunch decay” (318). Indeed, one can only attain to the universal role of Village Uncle, the “patriarch” of the village (319), as the flesh of one’s body has begun to deteriorate. Uncle Parker, the bearer of the avuncular title previous to our narrator and an “old salt” (314), was

a lean old man, of great height, but bent with years, and twisted into an uncouth shape by seven broken limbs; furrowed also, and weather worn [...]. He looked like a harbinger of tempest [...]. One of uncle Parker's eyes had been blown out with gunpowder, and the other did but glimmer in its socket. (314)

The magic number seven here alludes to the dissolution of masculine prowess. However, prophets often arrive in tattered form, and despite being blind Parker would turn his eye “upward as he spoke” (314).¹¹⁶ The narrator inherits Parker's vocation after his “rheumatic bones [are] dashed against Egg Rock,” and “[w]ith a broken voice I give utterance to much wisdom” (319); might he not also, like the “crazy maiden,” who had “the gift of prophecy,” be “loved and pitied” by the villagers (320)? Prophetic powers are presented as ostensibly feminine, which, preposterously, takes *precedence* over masculine rectitude.

X. Hawthorne's “Salty” Avunculate

As we saw in the Danish example of *legeonkel* previously, “uncle” is a particularly fluid designation that is not necessarily based on biological kinship. As an adjective, “avuncular” can denote the mere semblance of an uncle (*OED*), and since the word, according to its Indo-European root, is derived from “grandfather” it is perhaps not surprising that “uncle” should come to be known as the “little grandfather,” as we have seen. Further, in the nineteenth century, “uncle,” Eve Sedgwick tells us, acted “as a metonym for the whole range of older men who might form a relation to a younger man [...] offering a degree of

¹¹⁶ Here we should remember that blindness is not a curse but the prerequisite of prophetic insight, as we know from the ancient story of the seer Tiresias, for example, who, significantly, spent seven years as a woman.

initiation into gay cultures and identities” (*Tendencies* 59).¹¹⁷ In Hawthorne’s tale, the avuncular function, however, aims at circulating a brand of “salt water” knowledge (9:315) that while it is masculine in tone, at first glance, is not directly homosexual. Hawthorne’s wondrous attachment to the sea is well known, and from earliest childhood he would relate to his family the “imaginative accounts of the [sea] journey he would make” as he grew up (Luedtke 15). Hawthorne owned a copy of Archibald Duncan’s *Mariner’s Chronicle*, which had belonged to his uncle, Richard Manning, who until his “premature death” had served as a “figure of paternal compass” for Hawthorne in lieu of his dead father. Hawthorne gave Melville, the “young salt,” his copy of *Mariner’s Chronicle* early in their friendship, as if to match the bathetic accounts of male torment at sea with his impression of Melville as “unashamed, sexual, tender, [and] manly” (Wineapple 64, 63).¹¹⁸ The Hawthorne of adolescence and young manhood obviously found captivating stories of male intimacy and affect at sea, and, as Luther S. Luedtke points out, drawing on accounts by Hawthorne’s family, Hawthorne appeared to have been more inclined towards going to sea than college (16). Consequently, after graduating from Bowdoin in 1825, “his non-literary occupations were all related to shipping and trade,” the most famous example of which would become his stint at “the Boston Custom House in 1839-1841” (16). As we have seen, his sketch on the Custom-House, which begins *The Scarlet Letter*, is also where he associates the unreal luminosity of fire with the imagination.

¹¹⁷ Eve Sedgwick includes aunts in the avunculate, and, as such, she expands on the etymology, which exclusively recognizes (maternal) uncles. Her usage, while textually appropriate, is technically muddled.

¹¹⁸ In Volume 2 of *Mariner’s Chronicle* appears the narrative of the shipwreck of one M. de Brisson, a French seaman who in July 1785 found himself in trouble off the coast of North Africa. As the ship “struck upon shoals,” a “dreadful confusion ensued. The masts being loosened by the shock, quivered over our heads, and the sails were torn into a thousand pieces. The terror became general; the cries of the sailors, mixed with the terrible roaring of the sea, irritated, as it were, by the interruption of its course between the rocks and the vessel, added to the horror of the scene. In this dangerous state, such was the consternation of the crew, that no one thought of saving himself. ‘O my wife!’ cried one. ‘O my dear children!’ exclaimed a second; while others, extending their hands towards heaven, implored the divine protection” (158).

The “amphibious” fishermen in “The Village Uncle” appear “as if they did but creep out of salt water to sun themselves” (9:313). Accordingly, perpetual “sun burn[s] and sea breezes” transform the narrator into a sojourner of the sea. Appearing suddenly as a fisherman—outfitted in full garb: “There were the tarpaulin, the baize shirt, the oil cloth trowsers and seven league boots” (313)—and wearing “another face” (313) he can “spread an adventurous sail” away from land (314), as Hawthorne had hoped to do. Carl Gustav Jung highlights the baptismal quality of salt water in his *Mysterium Coniunctionis* (199), and this is perhaps why, to Hawthorne’s wearied narrator, it should seem desirable to have been “christened in salt water” (9:315). According to Jung, salt is closely tied to the *prima materia*, “the best known synonyms” of which “are the ‘chaos’ and the ‘sea’” (193); it is also thought to be “virginal” (190). It is no wonder, then, that the salty disposition of Hawthorne’s narrator should engender a certain “sympathy with the young and gay” (9:330). Salt, hence, is associated with an “original” knowledge of the elements that allows the narrator to connect with the virginal innocence of youth, in order to move toward a new sense of community beyond the strictures of age, filiation, and even gender, through the mediating function of the avunculate, which, importantly, can only be formed after the narrator has been “dashed” by the spray of the ocean to give him “another face” (313).

Here, we might then see an allusion to the Dead Sea (christened “Lot’s Sea” in Melville’s long poem *Clarel*, Part 2, Chapter 33), which, according to myth, is geographically proximate to the twin cities of Sodom and Gomorra. Famously, Lot’s wife was transformed into a pillar of salt when she disregarded God’s warning not to look behind her as she fled Sodom with her family (Gen. 19:26). This backward glance not only seals, or solidifies, her own fate, but it prepares the ground for two future sodomitical acts: her daughters’ incestuous relations with Lot, brought about by the fear that their clan would

perish lest they become vessels for their father's seed (Gen. 19:31-38). The pillar of salt, encrusting Lot's wife, forever turned towards the "original" site of sodomy—which means that her behind "faces" forward, narratologically, in the direction of her daughters' imminent impregnation by their father—becomes a monument to the threat and subsequent narrative reproduction of sodomy. While it is true that, as Cameron McFarlane points out, the story of Sodom is perhaps "the foundational text of 'sodomitical practices'," which are "antithetical to the concerns of founding, developing, and maintaining the nation" (55), the aftermath of the divine destruction of Sodom shows us that the "taint" of sodomy lives on. In Hawthorne, the association of seafaring with male-male contact renders the sexuality of young and old "salts" alike somewhat ambiguous. On this account, and in relation to the unfortunate end of Lot's wife, I don't believe it is too far-fetched to suggest that being "christened" in salt water is not necessarily expressive of divine cohesion (the lower-case spelling might further indicate as much), as "salts" come to "know more than men ever learn in the bushes" (9:315). What is more, since Hawthorne maintained an idea of the ocean as providing a refuge from judgment, the watery grave that he describes in the youthful poem "The Ocean," where "Calmly the wearied seamen rest / Beneath their own blue sea" (ll. 9-10), might, however ironically, signify as the only appropriate place for men to find a place of final intimacy in Hawthorne's writing.

As we will remember, sympathy has a cleansing property, and childish influence, according to Hawthorne, has the ability to purify the rot of old age. Basically, childhood belongs to a time before the Fall—prior to the binary ordering of existence—while adulthood symbolizes the post-lapsarian reality of humanity. Typically, in Hawthorne's mythos, every adult carries the potential of childhood within, the "nucleus" of which is just waiting to be activated. In the present story, this "internal," childish core is activated by the exposure to

salt, but rather than the usual reversal from adult to child-knowledge, resulting in confusing connections and alliances, in this case, salt-knowledge prompts a form of sympathy that refers youthfulness to the biblical tradition of sodomy. The salty ocean, however, to the young Hawthorne, seems purer than the earth; as such, whereas “[t]he ocean solitudes are blest, / [...] The earth has guilt [and] care / Unquiet are its graves; / But peaceful sleep is ever there, / Beneath the dark blue waves” (“The Ocean” ll. 13-16).

The Village Uncle is re-born between salt and fire (the sun), and seafaring—itself a symbol of Hawthorne’s thwarted desire—comes to represent a second birth, another shot at fulfilling “the fairest hope of Heaven,” which we can perhaps, then, locate outside the domestic sphere. The mystery of the sea thus remains internal to Hawthorne’s imagination, which in this case is activated by the presence of salt. We can therefore view the text as the afterbirth of the romantic union between the Actual and the Imaginary. Hence, the hidden potential of childhood to re-birth itself, fantasmatically, surfaces once more through allegory. Richard Rand has located an etymological reference to the womb “in the meaning of hysteron as last” (52). “Somehow, obscurely,” he goes on to note, “the womb, the source of life itself, is linked in the Greek language with the word, the verb hystereo, that does not know an origin in any sense” (52). This confusion may be solved, Rand suggests, if we indicate, “by a reversal of cause and effect, that the afterbirth, the placenta, has a name for the place that it came from in the first place” (52). The origin of Hawthorne’s “saltiness,” I suggest—as a way of substituting the blurred chronology of the narrator’s life—is to be found in the story of Lot and his wife’s backward glance that prompts the proliferation of sodomy.

XI. The Alchemical Confusion of Genealogy and Gender in *The Dolliver Romance*

A man, arriving at the extreme point of old age, grows young again, at the same pace at which he has grown old; returning upon his path, throughout the whole of life, and thus taking the reverse view of matters. Methinks it would give rise to some odd concatenations.

—Hawthorne, *The American Notebooks*

Fathers commonly / Do get their children, but in this case of wooing / A child shall get a sire.

—Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew*

In his notes to *The Dolliver Romance*, one of the last fictions he ever worked on, Hawthorne suggests that cheating death means “losing sight of hea-[ven] because his back is now turned upon it” (13:539); becoming “earthly,” precipitates a turn away from “the light” (539). In “The Village Uncle,” this appears in subtle ways (heaven reflected in a puddle, for example). However, *The Dolliver Romance* provides us with the occasion to examine further the link between the preposterous and childhood, as this complicates Hawthorne’s previous idealization of childhood. Like the backward growth of his protagonist, fantasies of childhood are ultimately undercut by “disappointment” (542), and only a natural child can “redeem the gloom” (542).

What the editors of *The Elixir of Life Manuscripts* refer to as an “abortive romance,” *The Dolliver Romance* is concerned with “revers[ing] the aging process” through alchemy (13:578-79).¹¹⁹ Considered as a perversion of the natural progression of life towards death—“it is inconsistent with the plan of the world, and, if generally adopted, would throw

¹¹⁹ Klaus P. Stich has indicated that, based on textual evidence, “alchemy was at least occasionally on Hawthorne’s mind from a time prior to the publication of [*Twice-Told Tales* in] 1837 to his unfinished romances of the early 1860s” (“Hawthorne’s Intimations of Alchemy.” For the full text of Stich’s article: <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=9604290616&site=ehost-live>).

everything into confusion” (532)—the alchemical process would quite literally result in a second infancy;¹²⁰ it might “make life go back upon its steps,” as Hawthorne puts it in “Study 1”—the first in a series of draft documents that is attached to the *Dolliver* manuscript in the *Centenary Edition*. Hawthorne went so far as to imagine *Dolliver* ending with the protégé of the alchemist, as an old man, finding the latter, “an infant,” “on his door-step” (534). The preposterous, in this case, must be understood in the sense of *postponing* the *preeminence* of death; or reverting to a stage of life that is supposed to be prior to one’s current circumstance—putting first again that which was supposed to have been concluded: childhood.

The incomplete manuscript of *The Dolliver Romance* puts us in the presence of old Dr. Dolliver, who is experiencing the effects of his alchemical potion: “many childish impulses [are] softly creeping back on the simple-minded old man” (13:457). In fleshing out the story in his notebook, Hawthorne imagined that the mystery of the story could only be discovered as the protagonist regressed to become “a little boy again; and as the story ends, you shall see it in his childish eyes” (533). The narrative can only progress, to Hawthorne’s mind, by the backward-growth of the protagonist, which intersects chiastically with the normal aging of his protégé: “50—30—60—20—70—10,” until the former reaches infancy (again) and the latter arrives at death’s door; their destinies have been inverted. The slow inversion of the protagonist’s age is in turn linked to how Hawthorne conceived of the story. As he muses in “Study 4,” “Perhaps I had better look to the end to suggest the beginning” (537). This insistence or turn towards childhood is signified in *The Dolliver Romance* by “the grasp” of “baby-fingers” holding the aged protagonist “back” from following his “departed” peers into oblivion (453). Apparently, the fascination with diminutive shapes is consistent

¹²⁰ An unnatural long life is generally the main trope associated with works of fiction dealing with alchemy (see Mark Morrison 23).

throughout Hawthorne's authorship. It is perhaps significant in this regard that the novel never came to full fruition—not so much aborted as left in stasis, contained at the stage of infancy.¹²¹

As a result of the early effects of the alchemical potion, Dolliver finds himself on “intimate terms” (456) with the kitten of the household and his great-granddaughter to the extent that “his remnant of life might have been as cheaply and cheerily enjoyed as the early playtime of the kitten and child” (457); in this way, he meets with Hawthorne's original intention of the story, as expressed in “Study 1,” namely that of “a well-preserved old man, aping a younger age than his real one” (531), who nonetheless shall end up a “poor monster” (548), as “there is a curse on everything that God did not mean us to have” (545). Aping in this case is considered unnatural, even “monstrous,” as it anticipates the very “real” regression of Dolliver into a second infancy, which goes against the human order of existence.

Early in the story, Dolliver appears from his bedroom dressed in “a patchwork morning-gown of an ancient fashion,” which is “said to have been the embroidered front of his own wedding waistcoat and the silken shirt of his wife's bridal attire” (453-54). The blending of differently gendered textiles signal to the reader the transgendering potential of alchemy, which finds expression in the ambiguous gender of Dolliver's great-granddaughter who appears at different times as female and male. (Patricia Parker reminds us on this point that a “‘preposterous’ confusion of apparel” befits the “reversal of the proper ordering of male and female” [“Preposterous Events” 188]). What is more, Dolliver's gown is suffused by “a smell of drugs, strong-scented herbs, and spicy gums, gathered from the many potent

¹²¹ Indeed, in the so-called “Study 4” of *Dolliver*, Hawthorne remarks that the protagonist's “scorn of all human pursuits and things” as well as “spiritual things” “must be so handled as to show the necessity of Death in order to keep us tender and loving” (536).

infusions that had from time to time been spilt over it” (Hawthorne 13:454). This “odorous and many-colored robe” (454), taken with the staff that he carries, makes the doctor appear like the magician the Village Uncle only resembled in spirit. The alchemical effect of this story thus depends on how the gender of Dolliver’s great-granddaughter is intertwined with the trans-chronology of the story and the cross-dressing of her old relative.

As opposed to the narrator of “The Village Uncle,” there seems to be less ambiguity surrounding the doctor’s family circumstances. He is a gentle old man, who completely answers to the “authoritative tones of little Pansie—Queen Pansie, as she might fairly have been styled, in reference to her position in the household” (454). Her influence, as in “Little Annie,” draws the protagonist outside the circle of humanity:

When little Pansie was the companion of his walk, her childish gaiety and freedom did not avail to bring him into closer relationship with men, but seemed to follow him into that region of indefinable remoteness, that dismal Fairy Land of aged fancy, into which old Grandsir Dolliver had so strangely crept away. (465)

Edwin Haviland Miller suggests in his biography that Hawthorne appears in the story as both “the aged apothecary and the abandoned, parentless child” (507). This duality, which is again similar to that of “Little Annie,” adds another level of confusion to the blending of generations and genders that *The Dolliver Romance* serves as an example of; for the first time in Hawthorne’s authorship, the indeterminacy of youth seems to affect the gender of the characters, and that in a regressive way. Like Dolliver’s faded garment, Pansie appears as an amalgamation of past materials: “She seemed the baby of a past age oftener than she seemed Pansie” (457); “all their [Dolliver’s dead female relatives] hitherto forgotten features peeped through the face of the great-grandchild” (457). It might be that, in general, as the narrator puts it, “our true self” has been muffled by a “somber garment, woven of life’s unrealities,”

within which nevertheless “smiles the young man whom we knew” (463, 464). Pansie, however, from infancy, has been overlaid with the masks of distant, dead relatives, and we might therefore question whether she can ever embody a true self. Her melancholy mood is described as a “shadow of the house and the old man” (467). How much freedom does this child have? Her mien is that of an older person, exuding “a certain pensiveness,” which is one possible connotation of her name (467). The origin of her “odd name” (466) is uncertain, and, aside from pensiveness (derived from the French of her “Acadian kin” [467]), it might allude “merely to the color of her eyes, which in some lights, were very like the dark petals of a tuft of pansies in the Doctor’s garden” (467). Pansie—whose weighty title as great-granddaughter seems “quite to overwhelm [her] tiny figure” (457)—is “naughty” (476), like her floral namesake,¹²² and when Dolliver catches her digging up the forbidden plant used by her long dead father to make the elixir she takes off running, “as if to escape Time or Death” (477). Pansie is inexplicably drawn to the plant of “doubtful character” (476). This episode further signals the deadly pursuit of alchemy, as Pansie’s escape takes her in the direction of the burial-ground, where “a newly dug grave [is] ready to receive its tenant that afternoon” (477). Does Pansie willfully lead Dolliver in the path of the open grave that he almost tumbles into, or is she trying to warn him not to dabble in the dangerous craft of alchemy? Her “fitful sensibilities” appear incalculable to Dolliver (477)—and Hawthorne alike, we suspect—and this episode emphasizes the fact that it is never really clear if children are allies or foes in Hawthorne’s *oeuvre*.

¹²² In “A Study of Dolls,” A. Caswell Ellis and G. Stanley Hall relate how one of their study participants, as a child, would use flowers as dolls. The woman writes that she “often took pansies for dolls because of their human faces” (133). She would make different flowers into dolls, and she continues her account by explaining the relationship between them: “The pansy was a willing, quick, bright flower child, the rose her grown up sister, pretty, always charmingly dressed, but a quiet and sedate spectator. Violets were shy, good natured children, but their pansy cousins were often naughty and would not play” (133).

In addition to old Dolliver, Pansie undergoes a transformation in the story as well. On the paratextual level, she appears as the transgendering of Hawthorne's initial premise of the story, in which Dolliver was supposed "to live for the sake of an infant boy, not his own descendant, but that of a friend, who sacrificed his own life for him" (534); her adult expressiveness foreshadows Dolliver's alchemical reversal into childhood, the gender of which now comes to seem uncertain. Not only do Pansie's gender and origin change in the final manuscript, but on the very next page of "Study 4" the "child" becomes a "girl," which is the more curious for the fact that Hawthorne does not so much as comment on this seemingly substantial alteration in his notes (535). Moreover, her name, in this early version, is Alice, and Pansie, in this way, comes to figure as the uncertainty principle that governed Hawthorne's continually changing conception of the story.¹²³ From boy to girl, Alice to Pansie, and in the story itself she changes names once more to Posie (474). The presence of Alice/Pansie/Posie may therefore be one of those "odd concatenations" that Hawthorne thought would grow out of this story (8:285). The ongoing transformative process of Hawthorne's conceptualization of *Dolliver* seems, then, to highlight the uncontrollable nature of alchemy.

These "concatenations" often have a horticultural origin in Hawthorne's authorship, which can likely be attributed to the vexed influence of his Uncle Robert.¹²⁴ Indeed, the "luxurian[t]" flowers that go into making the "quaffer" in *Dolliver* give off a "natural repulsiveness" (13:470) that "warn[s] [...] of an unrevealed peril" (470). We can compare this to "The Birth-Mark," in which story the successfully concocted "Elixir Vitæ," the protagonist muses, might "produce a discord in nature, which all the world, and chiefly the

¹²³ In their Historical Commentary on *The Dolliver Romance*, Edward H. Davidson and Claude M. Simpson note Hawthorne's reluctance to begin writing the story, as he had "'a perception of very disagreeable phantoms to be encountered, if I enter'" (13:574).

¹²⁴ Robert Manning published his *Book of Fruits* in 1838, which, Mellow reports, "was for years the standard text on the tested varieties of pears, peaches, apples and cherries suitable for cultivation in New England" (15).

quaffer of the immortal nostrum, would find cause to curse” (10:46). Alchemy in this way devalues the separation between “high” and “low,” and as it is not merely content to invert the relationship between heaven and earth, the two are mixed in a most “unnatural” manner in order to fulfill the transgressive promise of final insight into the workings of the universe.

The frequent allusion to “luxury” in *Dolliver* further warns the reader that alchemy is a queer pursuit along the lines of other “anti-republican” interests, of which we should also count Hawthorne’s aversion to public education. Philip Greven has noted how John Hancock excoriated “Bostonians in March 1774” to avoid the “‘soft arts of luxury and effeminacy’,” as these may be “‘used to betray our youth of one sex into extravagance and effeminacy, and of the other to infamy and ruin’” (351). Greven goes so far as to suggest that the “fear of effeminacy” was to influence, unconsciously, the political vision of the early republican years (351). The use of luxury, as we saw in Chapter 1, persists as a signifier for queerness in general well into the nineteenth century, and it is not surprising that it should enter Hawthorne’s prose concerning the indeterminacy of the alchemical elixir, which in *Dolliver* comes to seem the more precarious still, due to the confusions concerning age and gender that surround it.

XII. The Luxurious Counterfeit

In *Dolliver*, the luxuriance of the alchemical product produces a distrust of value. The protagonist’s grandson, Pansie’s father, is the mastermind behind the elixir, and Dr. Dolliver is reduced to “shop-boy” of his own pharmacy (471). Shilling his grandson’s “questionable compounds” that he fears is “trash or worse,” he nonetheless examines

closely the silver or the New England coarsely-printed bills which he [takes] in exchange, as if his faith in all things were shaken, as if apprehensive that the emptiness and delusive character of the commodity which he [is selling] might be balanced by equal counterfeitings in the price received. (472)

While some of the ingredients used to produce the potion “‘are common things enough’,” as Dolliver says to himself, “‘some of them a little queer, one or two that folks have a prejudice against’” (13:480). But queerest of all must be “‘that one thing that I don’t know’” (480)—“‘[t]he thing is a folly’” (481). We will recall from the previous chapter that “folly,” in the realm of architecture, generally refers to a structure of dubious function or propriety, and it moreover connotes excess and even falsehood (see McClung 130). In the context of *Dolliver*, the word has a similar meaning, indicating that the fallacious ingredient could not be trusted to produce beneficial or “useful” results. Webster’s *American Dictionary of the English Language* of 1841 further defines “folly” as meaning an “absurd act,” which, depending on the context, can be considered either “not highly criminal” or, more ominously, “highly sinful.”¹²⁵ As counterfeit coins were often made by mixing base materials with gold or silver, alchemists from the Middle Ages on, as William R. Newman points out, would use “the most varied substances to make their marvelous agent of transmutation” (xiii); among these were found, “Dew, humus, [and] urine” (xiii).¹²⁶ This is affirmed in Hawthorne’s short story, “The Birth-Mark,” as “the Golden Principle might be elicited from all things vile and base” (10:46).

Perhaps not surprisingly, then, early American intellectuals who experimented in alchemy with “the hopes of increasing the stock of money,” Stephen Mihm points out,

¹²⁵ 88; <http://edl.byu.edu/webster/term/1864007>.

¹²⁶ Seventeenth-century alchemist Thomas Vaughan calls earth the remainder of the Creation, which is a “faeculent impure Body” (qtd. in Haeffner 115).

“eventually settled on paper money as a roundabout means of achieving the alchemical effect” (*A Nation of Counterfeiters* 29-30). Before the linkage between counterfeiting and alchemy was made apparent in the post-Revolutionary era, the proliferation of wealth had been viewed in the context of chemical magic; counterfeiting would simply come to highlight the artificial link between money and value.¹²⁷ The counterfeit breeds nothing “real” or “genuine,” and compared to usury—which actually produces more value through interest—counterfeiting puts forth the expectation and appearance of value only to mock and disrupt the relationship between what stands in for the original value—money, in this instance—and the notion that material signifiers can embody any such “primary” value. In other words, by making “strange” this relationship, the counterfeit challenges the practice of exchange and the “breeding” of capital at the same time; what initially appears fecund is revealed as barren. In this way, the counterfeit is almost analogous to sodomy, in that counterfeiting and sodomy make preposterous the act of reproduction in the realm of economics and sexuality, respectively. This prompts us to consider the instability of the binary authenticity/fakery, as “what is authentic in one situation may be a sham in another,” Mary McAleer Balkun observes, and “‘realness’ becomes a matter of perception rather than a definitive attribute” (6). She goes on to relate counterfeiting to the wider, Western “binary system of valuation, which, ironically, also determines which objects end up in museums and which do not, includes such oppositions as us/them, present/past, authentic/nonauthentic, art/nonart, real/fake, and cultured/uncultured” (12); this list is of course quite similar to the one Cameron McFarlane produces in *The Sodomite in Fiction and Satire 1660-1750*, which consists of, for example, natural/unnatural, and nature/culture. The disruptive value of the

¹²⁷ Addressing this anxiety, from colonial America onward, different statutes and laws had sought to regulate the relationship between citizens and economic practices, and it was common for banknotes to include the warning, “‘To Counterfeit is Death’” (Mihm, *A Nation of Counterfeiters* 35); however, this extreme punishment was never meted out by the federal government (109). In fact, by the time the Second Bank of the United States was founded in 1817, a counterfeiter “ran at most the risk of a short prison term” (116).

counterfeit can be traced etymologically, as Valerie Forman has pointed out in a discussion of economic structures in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, where she states that "'to counterfeit' means to make in opposition or contrast. Counterfeits inevitably then raise the question of how something that imitates or copies also works against that which it imitates. Inherent in counterfeiting is a tension, a pull in opposing directions" (115). Ultimately, not only inverting the system of valuation, the counterfeit calls attention to the fact that the relation between the material signifier and actual value is completely arbitrary; as such, it reveals that which should *not* be revealed—the inherent artificiality of all binary constructions—and this is one reason why, for Hawthorne, the secret ingredient of the elixir cannot, or should not, be named.

The notion of counterfeiture has wide-reaching applications outside the domain of economics. In *Counterfeit Gentlemen*, John Mayfield uses "counterfeit" as a term to explain Southern American manhood as "confused, tentative, situational, self-fashioned, and always in search of the right pose or 'presentment'" (xv). This emphasis on affectation is not unique to the South, and Mihm has shown how a "fascination with artifice" might be more generally applicable to the American experiment as such. In the article, "The Alchemy of Self," which, we remember, more specifically concerns the infamous counterfeiter, Steven Burroughs, he writes that "there was a growing obsession throughout the colonial period with deceit and imposture, concerns that coincided with challenges posed to the conventional social order by religious ferment, revolutionary stirrings, and the spread of market capitalism" (127).

Counterfeiting, understood as a willful move toward artifice and posing, therefore, is part of a shift toward a "more democratic ethos," according to Mihm (127). The democratizing force of the counterfeit to some degree, then, maintains the national anxiety concerning artifice. Hancock's condemnation of "the soft arts of luxury" and the unease by which Hawthorne

treats the subject of alchemy are two distinct, yet related examples of this. In a way related to preposterousness, as a trope, counterfeiting “reveals the discrepancies between ideology and practice, providing a way to interrogate the many tensions in American culture [such as] gender issues, sexual issues, and class issues as well as the impact of social and cultural changes” (Balkun 14). And, again, we are led to ask, with Patricia Parker, “how open to manipulation are the forms themselves” (“Preposterous Reversals” 439)?

In Hawthorne’s story, the ostensible dubiousness of the alchemical commodity appears to render everything around Dolliver potentially artificial. Dolliver fears that his grandson’s potions might be nothing but counterfeit remedies, and as such the money he receives should, in all fairness, correspond to this (un)value. Later in the account, Dolliver nevertheless wonders if the potion might not in fact be “worth its weight in gold” (13:482). As he has failed to estimate the worth of the secret ingredient passed to him from his grandson, the actual worth of the elixir remains inestimable. Following the death of the grandson, all his merchandise loses its value due to the belief that he died from tasting his own ostensibly “poisonous drugs” (473). (Interestingly enough, as Jung points out, “poison” or *Venenum* is synonymous with the tincture according to alchemical beliefs [201]). The health benefits that his customers had proclaimed are now (hysterically) reversed, and, curiously, this is when Pansie’s name first changes to Posie (474). The remedial and economic value of the potion remains in question, and we can relate its queer, or suspicious, status to Hawthorne’s previously mentioned penchant for horticultural imagery, which trades in the “ambiguous area between nature and artifice” (Erich 132). This invokes for us the by now familiar binary of natural/unnatural so central to sodomitical discourse. Gloria Erlich claims that all of Hawthorne’s “plot resolutions always confirm [the] position that altering nature vies with the Creator and is therefore sinful” (132). In this way, the alchemist who

tampers “with the divine order [is] both the *highest* and the *lowest* of mankind” (132; my emphasis). The alchemical transgression against the natural order of things must seem even more “adulterous” to Hawthorne than the “cross-breeding” of different plants and vegetables (Erich 132), which is “the monstrous offspring of man’s depraved fancy, glowing with only an evil mockery of beauty,” as he puts it in “Rappaccini’s Daughter” (10:110). The Hawthornian child has an uncanny ability to locate the plant that goes into making the elixir. Joined by the “elvish” kitten, Pansie/Posie pulls the “shrivelled” and “cankered” plant from the soil (13:475). This reminds us of Ibrahim, the gentle Quaker boy, who discovers “hidden gold where all is barren” (9:89). And, childhood, in this way, Hawthorne seems to suggest, is able to account for the “true,” perhaps metaphysical, value of things devoid of the taint of commodity fetishism or national rhetoric that condemns certain objects and behaviors as being luxurious.

The second childhood—which is the promise of alchemy—must then necessarily be considered as an impure derivative of the first; in other words, it should be deemed a counterfeit. Like any other ultimately imperfect copy, Hawthorne imagines that his protagonist shall exhibit some peculiarity visible to the discerning eye: an “expression of the eye, it might be, a look of age, or possibly a gray lock of hair, or a withered hand” (13:543). Like the mesmerizing villain, Westervelt, in *The Blithedale Romance* whose eyes contain “the naked exposure of something that ought not to be left prominent” (3:92), Hawthorne indicates that Dolliver’s eyes, under the influence of alchemy, as it were, will exude a queer glimmer. In this unfinished romance, concocted at the end of his life, Hawthorne presents us with a perverse example of what the desire for youth may look like. In “Study 11” he gives us a view of the antagonist, the Colonel, who seeks Dolliver’s elixir: “The Colonel is famous in the town, for desiring to continue young, and there are strange and absurd stories about his

contrivances to keep so, such as his kissing children, his counterfeiting a love for them in order to inhale their breath” (549). The Colonel thus takes seriously the dictum expressed by the narrator of “Lille Annie” that “the pure breath of children revives the life of aged men” (9:129). This counterfeit love contrasts with the pedophilia of the narrator in “Little Annie,” as the pedophile’s love is pure and respectable compared to the counterfeiting ways of the “old brute,” the Colonel (13:549). The perversion of pedophilia strikes us as less perverse in this regard, and we are prompted to ask: which character is more preposterous? This query suggests to us again the volatility or malleability of the preposterous itself, which can influence and reverse the binary separations that inhere to the categories of age, gender, sexuality, nature, and culture.

Epilogue: Facing the Future of Inversion

In the introduction, we saw how Thomas Eakins in his painting, *Swimming*, gave precedence to the rear part of his central nude rather than his face. *Swimming*, in turn, became for us a visual metaphor of the preposterous trope. In the subsequent discussion of Emerson's so-called "aversive thinking," we had occasion to note how the preposterous "converts" the normative view of society to a back-turned aesthetic. Furthermore, in Chapter 1, our reading of Thoreau's figural system revealed a "preposterous prosopopeia" of Walden Pond, by which the tripartite metonymical structure of eye, mouth, and anus gave "face" to nature. Throughout this dissertation, it has been shown how a reversal of front and back can open up to a proliferation of figural displacements that often serves to make room for "minor" or "deviant" positions. Reading American literature preposterously, we have encountered and affirmed a host of unlikely, errant, and surprising pleasures (see Coviello, *Tomorrow's Parties* 12). Melville's interest in the "fundament" of the chimney in his short story revealed an association to the concealed interior of the structure, which, as it remained unfathomed, became symbolic of a resistant attitude towards the progression of domesticity.

As a way to end, I wish to explore further the ethical and aesthetic element of the preposterous, and how we might trace this to a time beyond the American Renaissance. I will show how a Levinasian concern with the "face," as the crucible of self/other, can—somewhat surprisingly—serve as a pathway to a discussion of preposterous ethics in view of Eakins' aesthetics and how it relates to the queer poetics of twentieth-century poets Jack Spicer and Hart Crane. This is not to downplay the specificity of the preposterous as it emerged in the authors of the American Renaissance, but rather to emphasize that the mobility of the trope is

such that it can be located in the figural elaborations of other, distinct periods in relation to the continued American development of sexual and gendered expression.

In *Precarious Life*, Judith Butler points out the central importance of the “face” in Emmanuel Levinas’ ethics. According to Butler, such an ethics concerns “the structure of address itself” (*Precarious Life* 129), which, for Levinas, is predicated on the belief that the self “cannot find meaning within its own being-in-the-world, within the ontology of sameness” (“Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas” 24). One’s relation to alterity, to the care of the other, is based on an asymmetrical condition to one’s own “ontological right to existence” (24). Ethics, for Levinas, therefore connotes a “refusal of the first truth of ontology – the struggle to *be*” (24)—which is a variant of Leo Bersani’s cruiserly, “self-subtracted being” (“Sociability and Cruising” 48). This leads Levinas to make the paradoxical and powerful claim that ethics is essentially “*against nature* because it forbids the murderousness of my natural will to put my own existence first” (“Dialogue” 24). In “Peace and Proximity,” Levinas conceives of the face in relation to Husserl’s notion of “appresentation,” which Levinas describes as “the mysterious surplus of the beloved” (166). The face is in effect a synecdoche of some moral value or innate element of the other, as appresentation denotes a “process whereby something else is made present through what is immediately or directly given,” and “Husserl argues that along with or through my direct presentation or perception of a person’s body or behavior, I can have an appresentation of that person’s state of mind” (194, note 11). This is why, to Levinas, the face exists “before any particular expression and beneath any expression” (167). And, yet, in a dialogue with

Richard Kearney, Levinas says of the face of the other that it is a relation of “verticality and uprightness; it spells a relation of rectitude” (“Dialogue” 23). He then goes on to state that “[t]he face is not in front of me (*en face de moi*), but above me” (23-24), as if to indicate the *Aufhebung* of self and other.

The Levinasian face “is not exclusively a human face, and yet it is a condition for humanization” (Butler, *Precarious Life* 141). Butler bases this insight on an anecdote from Russian writer Vassili Grossman’s *Life and Fate* that Levinas quotes in “Peace and Proximity:” “the story is of the families, wives, and parents of political detainees travelling to the Lubyanka in Moscow for the latest news. A line is formed at the counter, a line where one can see only the backs of others” (“Peace and Proximity” 167). In Grossman’s text, the human back is described as being particularly expressive, it “convey[s] states of mind in such a penetrating way. Persons approaching the counter ha[ve] a particular way of craning their neck and their back, their raised shoulders with shoulder blades tense like springs, which seem[] to cry, sob, and scream” (qtd. in “Peace and Proximity” 167). The back in this instance appears as a catachresis of the face (*derrière moi*), expressing hurt. The face is then simply a placeholder of what Levinas deems “the extreme precariousness of the other,” which comes towards *me* as an “extreme straightforwardness” (167). But it seems that this “straightforwardness” is the most pronounced in a moment of “backwardness,” which allows us to conceive of the other as a measure of the figural confusion of face and back. It is perhaps for this reason that Butler’s sense of ethics, qua Levinas, takes place in the dialectics between “humanization and dehumanization,” due to the fact that “personification sometimes performs its own dehumanization” (*Precarious Life* 141). In Chapter 1, we saw how Thoreau’s fragmented prosopopeia of nature resulted in a reversal of the anthropomorphization process; in Levinas, the human face is displaced in different ways, but

this does not lead to dehumanization unless the process is accompanied by specific, negative connotations.

Butler addresses the ways in which the production of “exotic” faces, in the media, for example, is framed by a violent mandate, so that, in relation to the so-called American War on Terror, Osama bin Laden’s face becomes “the face of terror itself,” Yasser Arafat’s “the face of deception,” and Saddam Hussein’s “the face of contemporary tyranny” (141). These are faces of “deformity and extremity, not [ones] with which you are asked to identify” (143). Indeed, as Butler makes clear, this

disidentification is incited through the hyperbolic absorption of evil into the face itself, the eyes. And if we are to understand ourselves as interpellated anywhere in these images, it is precisely as the unrepresented viewer, the one who looks on, the one who is captured by no image at all, but whose charge it is to capture and subdue, if not eviscerate, the image at hand. (143)

We have seen that Levinas figures the face as being always *above* “me,” as a relation of “rectitude;” but, as we witnessed in the passage from Grossman’s text, faces might also be found behind “me.” What kind of faces are we asked to face from behind, and when will this prompt us to question our sense of the “human” altogether?

A face might be superimposed on a behind. In the introduction to *Sodometries*, Jonathan Goldberg describes the advertisement for a t-shirt in *Rolling Stone* magazine that appeared just a few months after Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990: “a U.S. flag appears in the background, partially obscured by a camel; superimposed on the camel’s rump—obligingly turned to meet the viewer’s gaze—is the face of the Iraqi leader, smiling, slightly open-mouthed, his head swathed in Arab headdress” (1). This absurd image is accompanied by the caption: “America Will Not be Saddam-ized,” indicating that Iraq has committed rape

against Kuwait and that any forced invasion can be compared to homosexuality (1). Goldberg then gives a succinct reading of the camel/Saddam hybrid picture:

Saddam Hussein [...] is represented as homosexual, as the highly stigmatizing depiction makes clear. Saddam's head is where the camel's tail would be; hence the *face*, quintessentially human, is, in this image, animal; Hussein's mouth replaces the camel's asshole, and the reversal of front and back also implies an equation of anal and oral sex. Homosexuality thus linked to bestiality [once again] and to indiscriminate, promiscuous sexual behavior, is further tainted by all the ways in which the face reads as foreign—heavy black holes for eyes and mouth, black lines for eyebrows and moustache [...]. Although Saddam Hussein is declared to be a sodomizer the homophobia that fuels the picture aggressively sodomizes him [and the camel, we might add]. (1-2; my emphasis)



Plate 4: "America Will Not Be Saddam-ized," advertisement reproduced in Jonathan Goldberg, *Sodometries 2*.

In the first place, this late twentieth-century piece of phobic satire sums up the connections we made in Chapter 3 between sodomy, bestiality, and foreignness; at the same time, the image, in view of Butler's discussion of the face, reveals how the American response to otherness thus seems to vacillate between humanization/dehumanization, face/anus. The sodomitical face stands in for the anus; in homophobic discourse, the one is entirely contiguous with the other. In a sense, we are here dealing with what we might term the "re-appresentation" of the face, the reversal of Levinasian responsibility, or care, for the other, as the "quality" that we are asked to apprehend in the camel/Saddam hybrid has nothing to do with the other as such, and everything to do with the American representation and condemnation of evil as being contiguous with sodomy.

However, this dissertation has argued for a rhetorically fecund sense of male anality, which renders moot any such organization; if not to domesticate the anus, the goal has been to show the myriad ways in which the preposterous tropes of Thoreau, Melville, and Hawthorne envision for us different avenues of queer intimacy in the nineteenth century. But what if we were to propose a "universal" ethics of the preposterous, one that would finally move beyond the confines of good and evil, as represented by the face and the anus, respectively? The face of the homosexual, in a counter-sodometrical move, might then appear to us in a different guise altogether. Nevertheless, the potential of preposterous representation lies in the promiscuous fusing of different body parts and imagery; hence, in order to reach toward a new way of "facing" queerness, another anatomical study by Thomas Eakins will lead the way.

Eakins spent three and a half years in Paris, from 1866 to 1870, studying with some of the foremost French artists of the nineteenth century. In fact, the main inspiration for *Swimming*, which opened this dissertation, can be traced to Frederic Bazille's *Summer Scene*, which Eakins most likely saw in 1870 (Brettell 83). During his time in France, Eakins studied with another famous artist, Léon Bonnat, who became known as the “‘official’ painter of republican France” after having in 1877 painted a portrait of Adolphe Thiers, the first president of the Third Republic (Milroy 94, 93). Kathleen A. Foster points out the connection between Eakins’ “irreverent” depiction of the Crucifixion from 1880 and Bonnat’s “sensationally realistic” version of the same subject, which had been exhibited at the Salon of 1874 in Paris (Foster 15). Eakins found Bonnat to be an oddly “timid” and taciturn teacher,¹²⁸ but he nevertheless maintained a “profound admiration for Bonnat the painter” (Milroy 95).

Eakins’ admiration for Bonnat stems from the French artist’s masterful grasp of anatomical forms. Bonnat’s drawing from 1876 *Jacob Wrestling with the Angel* (plate 5) resonates in Eakins’ *Wrestlers* (plate 6), his last study of the male nude form, completed in 1899. This painting came into existence on the cusp of a new, confusing century and concurrent, or just after, the “invention” of the “twin” categories of homosexuality and heterosexuality. This new system of classification attempted to solidify former merely obscure or “odd” acts and behaviors into distinct and quantifiable categories.¹²⁹ The fact that Eakins completed his last painting of this kind at this time is therefore significant. Peter

¹²⁸ According to an eulogy published in the October 11, 1922, issue of *The Outlook*, “*pas mal!*” was the highest praise Bonnat ever bestowed on a pupil.

¹²⁹ Important in this regard is of course Richard von Krafft-Ebing’s work from 1886, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, but as Peter Coviello argues, drawing on Ed Cohen’s *Talk on the Wilde Side*, Oscar Wilde’s libel trial of 1895 is a more important event in the popular “solidification” of sexual identities (*Tomorrow’s Parties* 3, and 207, note 3).

Coviello notes the ambivalence that a writer such as Henry James, early in the twentieth century, would have felt concerning the new sexological “possibilities for legibility and illegibility both” (*Tomorrow’s Parties* 3). Combine this ambivalence with a concomitant sense of “rupture” from the “presexological past” (3), and we thus see a new perspective on male intimacy emerging—one that would spread to all art forms. Bonnat’s drawing of Jacob and the angel can be read, in a sense, as the representation of this epistemological rift. The drawing depicts a muscular, bearded Jacob tightly embracing the male form of the angel, whose face and locks are otherwise clearly feminine. The angel is barely resisting Jacob, and he appears almost listless. His downcast eyes signal erotic passivity. The homoeroticism, if not the *homosexuality*, of the drawing is unmistakable. As it breaks up the reproductive narrative of Genesis 32, from paragraph 24-32, the import of the original, biblical interval that inspired Bonnat conveniently lends itself to such imagining. The American twentieth-century poet Jack Spicer, for example, in a poem simply titled “Jacob,” writes of the divine wrestling match that “[t]hey [Jacob and the angel] had explored each other’s strength and every hour / was a tender repetition” (ll. 7-8). After the climax at dawn, Spicer emphasizes the fantastic, hallucinatory mood of the situation, as “there had never been an angel” (l. 11); in other words, Jacob had ostensibly engaged in a masturbatory battle with himself. This is keeping with the scholarly estimation of the biblical scene, as, first of all, it is not clear who hits whom in the thigh, Jacob or the angel. Henri Desroche suggests the following sequence of events:

Jacob did not succeed in dominating his adversary. He grabbed him and struck him in the hollow [of] the thigh and so gained advantage. The adversary then admitted defeat [...]. But it is the winner who loses; the tables are turned on Jacob, the hold is a hold

on himself: it is his own hip that has been thrown out of joint in the struggle during which he struck at the hip of his adversary. (187, note 11)

And, yet, in Spicer's poem, "Lucky Jacob / Limped across the river, thinking of his wives and oxen" (ll. 11-12). Fatigued, yet satisfied, the orgasmic battle, either with God or a mirage of himself, Spicer indicates that Jacob's fate as patriarch of Israel hinges on this queer interval in the biblical text; the wives and oxen appear merely as an after-thought to Spicer's Jacob, who "face to face" with God (Gen. 32:30) has seen a different form of desire. David Stern's observation that God loves Israel in a way that he cannot love other nations or kingdoms becomes pertinent to consider in this case (115). The Hebrew word used to connote this love is *haviv*, which points to "a kind of preciousness that derives its special value from the fact of being loved or held in a relationship of affection and intimacy" (116). That one of the most poignant moments of intimacy in the Old Testament is emphasized by the image of two male forms locked in a tight embrace is particularly significant in this regard.

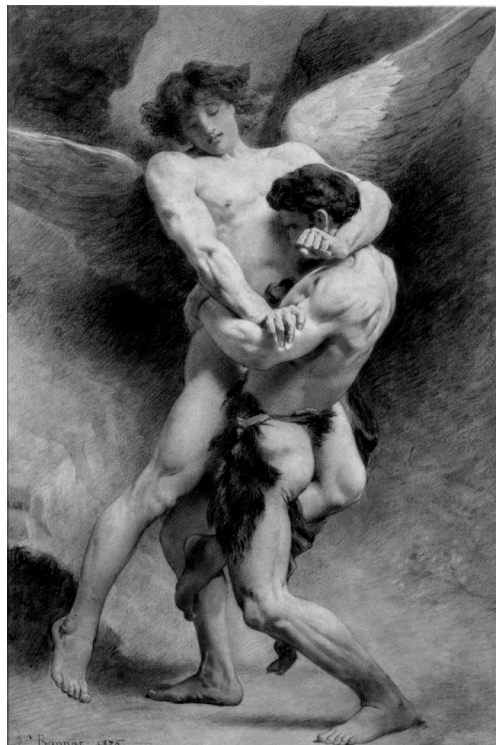


Plate 5: Léon Bonnat, *Jacob Wrestling with the Angel* (1876).

Eakins' *Wrestlers* depicts a similar scene of struggle. The two male wrestlers are fused in a horizontal deadlock; however, the upper, dominant male seems to be resting on top of the other, passive man, rather than pinning him. In fact, the wrestlers are so intertwined as to suggest the appearance of one, deformed body with two heads, located at opposite ends. In contrast with the biblical story of Jacob and the angel, and Bonnat's portrayal of it, the two men in Eakins' painting are not facing each other. This might initially indicate to us a lack of reciprocity and intimacy. However, there is a tenderness and intimacy present in this motif, underscored by the interlocking of hands towards the lower right corner of the canvas. We will here trace this mood of Eakins' image to the first half of the twentieth century—more specifically to the poetry of Hart Crane, which we encountered briefly in Chapter 2.

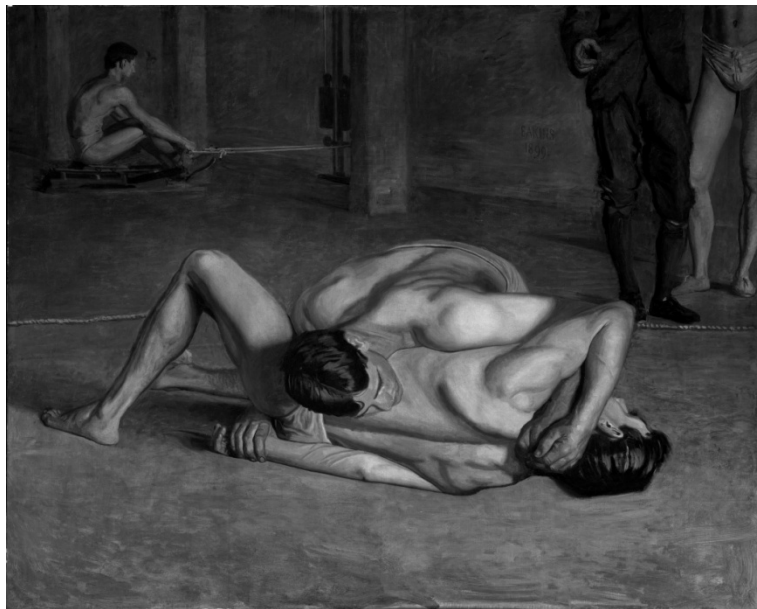


Plate 6: Thomas Eakins, *Wrestlers* (1899).

Crane's poem "Episode of Hands" concerns an episode that occurred at his father's factory, when a worker gashed his hand on a machine; "and like Whitman nursing soldiers after Fredericksburg, Crane found himself coming to the young man's assistance" (Mariani

68). “Episode of Hands” was composed in 1920, but “believing that the poem lacked sufficient fire and form, he abandoned it,” according to Paul Mariani’s biography (68). The poem begins *in medias res*, and centers on a moment of tenderness between two men of distinctly different class backgrounds: “The unexpected interest made him [the worker] flush. / Suddenly he seemed to forget the pain,— / Consented,—and held out / One finger from the others” (ll. 1-4). As the factory owner’s son tends to the wound of his father’s employee, both the role of the son and that of the worker are suspended within the factory milieu. In the action preceding the beginning of the poem, the speaker will have extended an invitation to the worker to put his wounded hand in his. In this way, the content of Crane’s poem highlights the potential of the lyrical genre to “reject[] the limitations of social and objective time,” as Sharon Cameron puts it (206). The pastoral imagery of Crane’s poem, hence, signals a disruptive state of affairs. That the “knots and notches” (l. 16) etched into the worker’s hands are compared to “the marks of wild ponies’ play” in line 18 converts the evidence of industrial toil into a natural plateau of rambunctious animal behavior. The disinvestment of the Symbolic Order appears anxiety-free in Crane, even calming, and the “confused cosmos” of the twentieth century that he so anxiously comments on elsewhere in his poetry gives way to a powerful idyll (see Mariani 193).

Initially, however, Crane’s imagined and admittedly naively founded arcadia of male bonding does not appear to go beyond its promise, and the image of “[b]unches of new green breaking a hard turf” in line 19 does not reveal anything but the motion itself. In turn, the impermanence of the lyric form encroaches upon the state of bliss described, and it would seem that the lyrical prophecy of the poem stops short of its own revelation: the scenario Crane imagines is thus harmonious yet temporally contained. But the two final lines give us pause, and prompt us to shift our reading in a more affirmative direction. They read: “And as

the bandage knot was tightened / The two men smiled into each other's eyes" (ll. 23-24). As the "stitching together" of the worker's wound, at the same time, paradoxically connotes the "tearing asunder" of normative time and social relations (see Statkiewicz 193), might we not, therefore, be able to ascertain in this poem the burgeoning of a careful optimism—an optimism that is "moored not to an unimaginable future," as Michael Snediker writes, but rather to a "beneficent crisis of the present" (218), which Crane's early lyrical poetry namely affirms?

Men facing men in moments of intimacy and passion indicates a turn away from the dictum of heterosexuality; it might even signify the "apocalypse" of the normal, as Cameron McFarlane suggests (55). In the tradition of homophobia, we would be asked to interpret this kind of "facing" as preposterous: the narcissistic turn towards the face of another man is also a turn away from the reproductive impetus of hetero-temporality. Crane's poem does not actually depict any faces *directly*; the closest we have are the catachrestic eyes of the final lines smiling into each other. Be that as it may, the bleeding "gash" embedded in the finger of the worker can be linked metonymically to his mouth, and following our previous analyses of Thoreau's Pond and Pluto's dungeon in Hawthorne's "Pomegranate Seeds," for example, we might suggest his anus as well. The "shaft of sun" (l. 5) is phallic, falling "lightly, warmly, down into the wound" (l. 7), and Crane's poem thus performs a scene of tender intercourse. The imagery of "Episode" relies heavily on improbable similes—hands like "wings of butterflies" (l. 14) and the "knots and notches" of skin as "the marks of wild ponies' play" (ll. 16, 18)—imitating, in the first instance, the gentle movement of insects to connect with the previous image of "light" intercourse in the second stanza, while the second simile brings to mind the evidence of an orgasm in the form of "natural" hieroglyphics etched on the body. The way these images weave together renders the tripartite metonymic

series—gash, mouth, anus—highly appropriate, and together they form an intricately erotic John Donneque conceit. The esoteric weaving together of different figures does not so much aim at “imitation”—which we know consists of a backward glance—as it is actually looking forward to the arrival of a kind of language that may adequately describe homoerotic attachment.¹³⁰

If, in this dissertation, we have termed “preposterous” the language of a certain form of historically contingent non-normative desire and intimacy, we can here add “catachresis” to the procession of tropes that performs the work of the preposterous. This particular figure of speech, a sort of mixed metaphor, is “the most deadly of linguistic sins” (Cummings 220), and catachresis is sometimes defined, not as a figure proper (in the sense of *proprietas*, the “natural” designation for a certain *res*, or thing [see Lausberg 241]), but as “an attempt at a figure which has gone wrong” (223).¹³¹ In *Antigone’s Claim*, Judith Butler shows how catachresis appears in Sophocles’ play as the only form of expression that can even hint at a system of signification “unwritten” by the force of public law (39). This leads to the formation of a “shadowy realm” of signification (78), which alludes to the impossibility of Antigone to express her love for her rebel brother, Polyneices, within the system that has condemned him and will condemn her continued attachment to him. This prompts Butler to make the claim that the “love that persists in spite of its foreclosure in an ontologically suspended mode” gives way to

¹³⁰ The Cranian smile, for Michael Snediker, is catachrestic “to the extent that a recalcitrantly frozen smile [see Crane’s poem “Voyages V,” l. 38] strains against the fleetingness which for smiles (conventionally speaking) is definitional” (49). This kind of catachresis thus depends on the “unnatural” duration of the particular smile, rather than on a mixed metaphor which is typically how we identify catachresis. We could say therefore, tongue-in-cheek, that Snediker’s use of catachresis in this instance seems catachrestic in itself, as he is “abusing” the nature of its usual application.

¹³¹ Despite the ostensible “deadliness” of catachresis, Heinrich Lausberg points out that it is “a very common semantic phenomenon,” giving the example of “the term ‘atomic nucleus’ [, which] is a catachresis ultimately derived from the effective world of fruit production (*nucleus* = kernel, pit)” (255); furthermore, “It is plausible that the vocabulary used to describe spiritual realities is catachrestic in origin: *animus* (‘wind’), *sapiens* (‘tasting’), *spiritus* (‘breath’)” (255).

a melancholia that attends living and loving outside the livable and outside the field of love, where the lack of institutional sanction forces language into perpetual catachresis, showing not only how a term can continue to signify outside its conventional constraints but also how that shadowy form of signification takes its toll on a life by depriving it of its sense of ontological certainty and durability within a publicly constituted political sphere. (78)

However, the “unspeakable” element of Crane’s poem results not in melancholia—although Crane certainly experienced many bouts of emotional torment in his life, and his melancholic, or depressive, disposition finally resulted in his suicide by drowning in April, 1932—but, actually “banish[ing]” (l. 21) “factory sounds and factory thoughts” (l. 20), the poem creates a new sense of relationality. It reveals what Eric Santner in a different context has referred to as “the possibility of fundamentally new possibilities beyond our ‘relational surrender,’ our domination by the currency and measure of our predicative being” (*On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life* 97), regarding the interlinked hierarchical structures of class, gender, and sexuality.

Through the unlikely fusing of disparate characteristics, Crane brings us close to the contours of a face that does not face backward or forward, but simply persists and insists through the image of a smile, affirming the intimate connections that language makes possible against itself, against the stability of “ontological certainty and durability.” The turn away from the hetero-temporal and -spatial environment of American factory existence in the early twentieth century, shows us the potential of the preposterous, through figural detours, to direct us to the fronting of queer intimacy. This potential is spelled out in Crane’s use of catachresis, what Lee Edelman refers to as “the figure of abuse” (*Transmemberment of Song* 10), resting as it does “on inexact appropriation, and as a verbal abuse it has the air of

something dangerous and disreputable” (12).¹³² Naming something which lacks a name of its own (speaking of the “face” of a mountain, for example) it simultaneously bridges and collapses “the opposition between figural and literal meaning” (13). Contextualizing the appearance of catachresis in modernist poetry, it can be linked to the central American concern of “making it new” that Crane wholeheartedly embraced—most clearly in the long poem, *The Bridge*—which, as it would require the revelation of an “unfractioned idiom” (*The Bridge*, l. 34) to achieve complete “newness,” would then appear as an “abuse” of conventional connections between language and object. As Edelman has noted, “the situation to which that new stage must respond is precisely that of a fragmentation, a ‘brokenness’ in the syntax of experience” (*Transmemberment* 25); at the same time, however, Crane worried that what he referred to as “the seething, confused cosmos” of his day might ultimately obstruct his ability to achieve in the image of the Bridge that sense of synthesis which his success, or prophetic virtue, as a poet depended on (see Mariani 193, and Edelman, *Transmemberment* 195).

While Edelman dedicates a substantial part of his study of Crane to the violating and scandalous trope of catachresis, in his later work *No Future* catachresis suddenly becomes the emblem of oppressive, queer-phobic futurism. Discussing Butler’s reading of the tragic figure of Antigone, Edelman impugns the catachresis by which Butler’s Antigone speaks, “altering and enlarging the meaning that the signifier ‘human’ is able to convey” (*No Future* 104), claiming that, at least in Butler’s usage, while catachresis “constrains *all* words to be always already other,” “that otherness, disruptive though the meanings toward which it transports our words may be, necessarily means reassuringly for us as subjects of the Symbolic insofar as we read it as signaling the necessary production of *future* meanings and

¹³² In the early modern period, lyric poetry was itself associated with “abuse,” as Heather Dubrow has pointed out (44).

thus as affirming the identity of the future with the *promise* of meaning itself” (105); in effect, Edelman argues, “Butler’s reading expels the Antigone who turns *no face* to the future [that is, negates her own catachresis] but takes to heart the meaning of her name [‘anti-generation’]” (105; my emphasis). Edelman’s Antigone would appear, instead, to become the figure of preposterousness *par excellence*, but, recalling the image of Saddam Hussein’s face improbably transposed onto the behind of a camel, catachresis can certainly work as a figure of “anti-generation,” which Edelman’s previous work on Crane also gestured towards. The “Saddamized” camel has no future within the American Symbolic, which nevertheless must define itself against, and internalize, the foreign, sodomitical other through a process of disavowal. This concerns “domestic” queerness as well. Following Edelman’s thesis, the only choice the queer has, should one want to live, is to “lose the face by which we (think we) know ourselves” (*No Future* 108). Queerness thus comes to embody a faceless *jouissance*, the path of ultimate resistance, which entails “the substantialization of a negativity that dismantles every substance” (109), including the face.

Face or no face, that seems to be the question. Edelman seems to deny that the queer could or should ever want to wear a “properly” human face, as queerness to him figures less as an identity and more as a disruptive force. But the enjoyment of “Episode of Hands” appears namely to center on the fusing of figures to allow for the faces of the two men to “flicker” like the wings of butterflies, frolicking like wild ponies. The particular smile that grows out of this seemingly illegible procession of figures nevertheless produces an enduring sense of intimacy in the very last line of the poem. While Snediker in his book devotes an entire chapter to Crane’s smiles, “Episode of Hands” receives no mention, and I suspect that this is because of its subtle invocation of joy through displacement, as well as the fact that it does *not* “insist upon [its] own nontransience” (99), like so many of the other smiles that

Snediker discusses; or perhaps it is in part because the smile of “Episode” is highly situational, and this “affective response” cannot therefore be said to be aimed primarily at the poem’s “style” (50). I am more sympathetic to Edelman’s earlier valuation of catachresis as an “unnatural” trope, in that it allows for the “breeding” of human and non-human figures in “Episode” to form a productively “bestial” image of queer togetherness that does not rehearse the by now somewhat clichéd reversal of face and anus, but which appears no less preposterous for it.

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